Art of the Dogon

Selections from the Lester Wunderman Collection

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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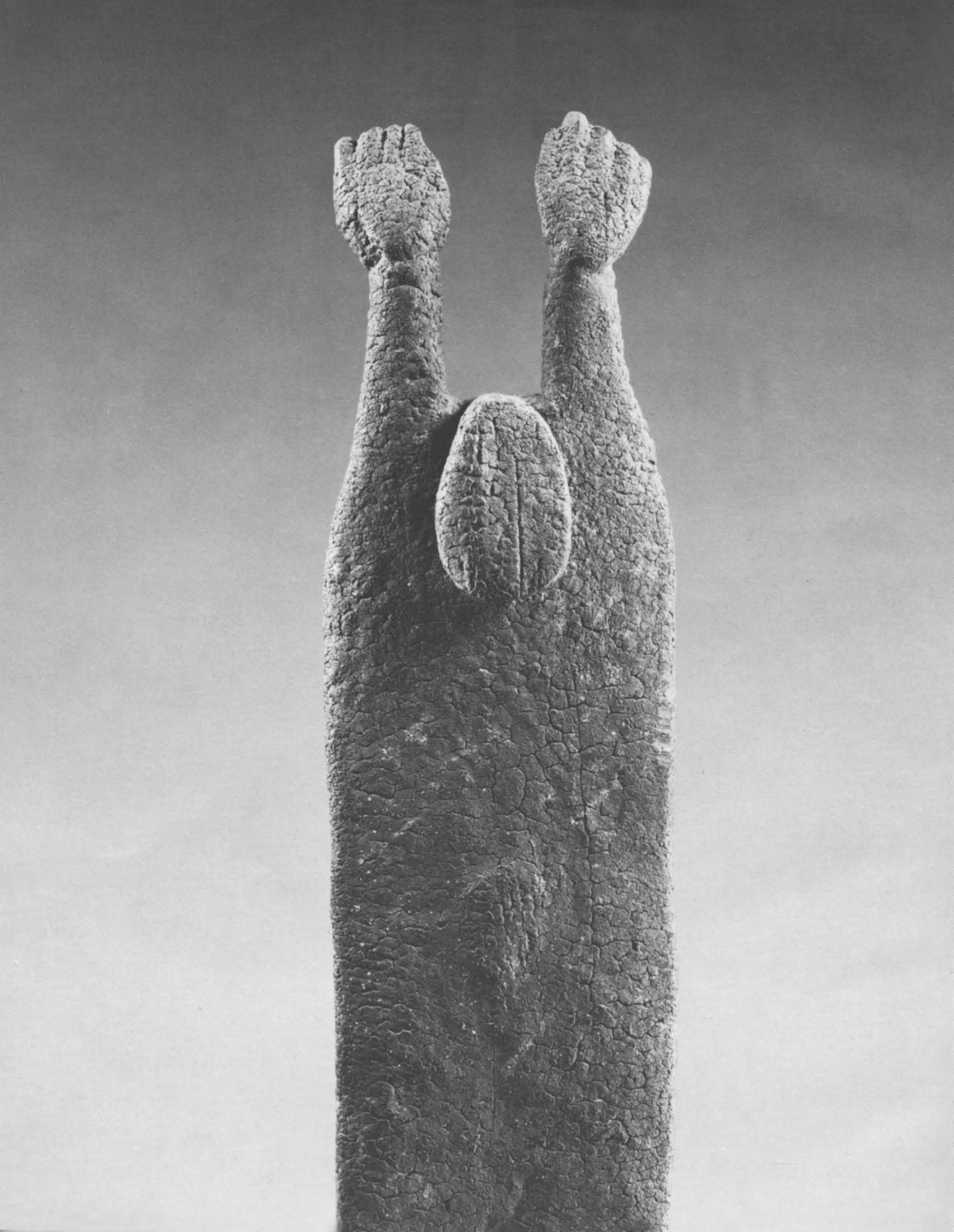

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Selections from the Lester Wunderman Collection

Kate Ezra

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
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On the front of the jacket/cover: *Horse and Rider* (No. 6)
On the back of the jacket/cover: *Figure with Raised Arm* (No. 2)
Frontispiece: *Figure with Raised Arms* (No. 18, detail)

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FOREWORD

The sculpture of the Dogon of Mali, one of the richest art traditions of West Africa, greets the visitor to the Metropolitan Museum's Michael C. Rockefeller Wing and constitutes one of the highlights of the Museum's permanent installation of African art. The outstanding collection of Dogon sculpture acquired by the Museum of Primitive Art and Nelson A. Rockefeller, transferred to the Metropolitan in 1978 and 1979, has been enriched by generous gifts made by Lester Wunderman in 1977, 1979, 1985, and 1987. Lester Wunderman's gifts to the Metropolitan, totaling 107 objects, have created a collection that few American or European museums can equal, either in range of objects or in quality.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that the Metropolitan Museum now presents the special exhibition *Art of the Dogon: Selections from the Lester Wunderman Collection*. In it are masterpieces of Dogon art drawn from the personal collection of Mr. Wunderman and from the group of objects he has donated to the Museum. Although this selection includes many objects not previously exhibited, this is not the first time the Wunderman collection has been shown to the museum-going public. In 1973 the Brooklyn Museum organized an exhibition of his collection, entitled *African Art of the Dogon*, which traveled to thirteen museums throughout the United States. For many Americans this exhibition provided a first exposure to African art. The collection has also been featured in educational films, most notably the "Tribal Eye" series produced for public television. Lester Wunderman's commitment to education and to making his collection accessible to a broad public has always been as strong as his passion for the art itself.

Lester Wunderman acquired his first Dogon object thirty-one years ago, and since then he has been unwavering in his dedication to the art and to the people who created it. He has climbed the Bandiagara cliffs where the Dogon reside, lived in their villages, and witnessed the rituals in which their art plays a major role. His collection reflects his appreciation for the sculptural sophistication of Dogon art and his understanding of the intellectual milieu that produced it. The Museum is deeply grateful to Mr. Wunderman for his generous gifts to the Museum, for lending a large portion of his personal collection to this exhibition, and for making possible the publication of this catalogue. It is a rare privilege for us to present this tribute to a devoted friend of the Museum and supporter of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing.

Philippe de Montebello
Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

PREFACE

When I browsed by the window of a small art gallery on La Cienaga Boulevard in Los Angeles one January evening in 1957, I didn't know that it was going to change my life. I was looking to buy a gift to take home to New York. I was about to walk on when I spotted a beautiful blonde woman sitting inside the gallery smoking a long black cigar. I decided to go in to see what possibilities the gallery contained.

The woman in charge of the gallery and I began to talk about art. I told her of my wish to take a birthday gift home to New York, something unique and not too expensive. It was the night of the week when Los Angeles galleries stayed open late, and she offered to show me around. We took a short tour, but I found nothing of interest. When we returned to her gallery, I had spent a fascinating evening but I hadn't found the gift I needed. There was no place else to look, and I was out of time. The woman suddenly had an idea. She asked me to wait while she went into her personal quarters in the back of the gallery, and she came out with a small wood sculpture of a kneeling figure. It looked to me like a Giacometti or a Picasso. "What is it?" I asked. "I don't know," she answered. "We just got it in a trade from a gallery in Paris that sells African art. The papers identifying it haven't arrived yet."

I bought the piece for $250 and took it back to my hotel. I didn't sleep much that night; that piece of art contained a kind of energy I had not experienced before. It wasn't life as represented by sculpture—it was sculpture that created life. Its energy was like the static of a radio station that I couldn't quite tune in. I wasn't going to rest until I could receive it loud and clear. I didn't know then that it was going to take me most of the rest of my life to hear the real music in that art.

When I returned to New York, I tried to identify the piece. It was a book on African art by Eliot Elisofon and William Fagg that finally helped me to recognize it as a sculpture from the Dogon people of Mali. Who were the Dogon? Why did they create art? What did it mean? For those answers I turned to the books of anthropologists such as Marcel Griaule and his associates from the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Since their work was in French and not yet translated, I spent the next few years learning to read French so I could understand them.

I began to look for Dogon art wherever it could be found, in galleries and museums of New York, Paris, London, and Brussels. It wasn't long before I acquired a second piece. Just about then a major collection of Dogon art was shown by Pierre Matisse in New York. I began to feel more comfortable with the various styles and subjects of Dogon sculpture, and as my confidence grew I began to acquire more pieces.

I continued to study every piece of Dogon art and to read every book I could find on the Dogon. I discovered the first early photographs of Dogon villages in the wonderful *Le Plateau central nigérien* by Louis Desplagnes, published in Paris in 1907. I soon met Eliot Elisofon, the great photographer and Africanist, and we became fast friends. Eliot loved African art, and he had photographed, collected, and written about it. He had also made films for television about African life and art. Eliot and I installed a photographic studio in my apartment where we worked together trying to understand African art through photography. He taught me to see Dogon art as the sculptors meant it to be seen. We re-created the blazing African sun with harsh, hot photographic lighting in our studio. Meanwhile I went on quietly collecting.

But soon my secret was out. Dealers from Paris, London, New York, Dakar, and Bamako started bringing me their best pieces of Dogon art. Over the years I saw thousands of pieces of Dogon sculp-

Fig. 1 Made of thickly stacked millet stalks, the roof of a men's meeting house, *togu na*, keeps the interior dark and cool. In this *togu na* the roof is supported by stone pillars rather than by carved wooden support posts (see nos. 41 and 42). Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, Ogol du Haut, January 1971; courtesy of National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

ture. I bought only the best of them, but every one I saw helped educate my eye.

I began to seek out scholars of Dogon culture wherever they were to be found: Dr. Rogier Bedaux and his associates at the University of Utrecht, who had explored the Dogon and Tellem caves; Dr. Hans Guggenheim at M.I.T.; Dr. Pascal Imperato, a friend of the Dogon, who had been in charge of an important mobile health program in Mali; Douglas Newton and Robert Goldwater at the Museum of Primitive Art; Roy Sieber of Indiana University; and Robert Farris Thompson of Yale. In Zurich, I spent nights in the bare psychiatric offices of Drs. Parin and Morgenthaler, who had lived with and practiced ethno-psychiatry among the Dogon in Sanga. Their book, *Les Blancs pensent trop*, reports their extraordinary experiences in Mali. I took graduate courses in African art history with Monni Adams and Douglas Fraser at Columbia University.

By 1972 I finally felt prepared to visit the Dogon people myself. Pat Imperato accompanied me to Kennedy Airport. There he took my tape recorder and spoke a message into it to Ogobara Dolo, chief of the village of Sanga. He asked Ogobara to receive me as a friend and to take care of me.

Nothing I had read or seen prepared me for the Dogon country. The huge baobab trees, the cliffs pockmarked with caves, the fierce heat of the sun, the baked black earth, the termite mounds, the smells of wood smoke and indigo dye, and the sound of the millet pounders. I was also unprepared for the warmth and love with which the Dogon people received me. From the moment I met Ogobara Dolo and played for him the taped voice of Pat Imperato, I was accepted as a friend and later as a brother and village elder. Ogobara and his brother Diangano, then head of the men's mask society, helped initiate me into their traditional ways and rituals. We climbed

the cliffs together. We visited villages on the plains, and we sat in the cool shade of the village *togu nas*. We played games with the children, had fierce mock arguments with the women elders, and experienced the special harmony the Dogon share with their beautiful but harsh environment. I met the holy men of the villages, the *hogons*. I was permitted to see and to photograph rituals: marriages, funerals, sacrifices, dances, and the making of art by the village smiths. I had never before felt so protected, loved, or at peace. The Dogon were materially poor. There was a shortage of everything but joy, love, and a zest for life. The house I lived in contained the cameras, medicines, clothes, food, and water I had brought with me. But it was the Dogon who brought me gifts—and asked for nothing but friendship in return. My days among the Dogon were the richest of my life.

When I returned home, I brought with me an understanding and respect for human dignity that I had not known before. I was determined to repay the Dogon if I could, and the opportunity soon presented itself. The first great drought of the 1970s had struck the region of the Sahel. With the help of Hans Guggenheim of M.I.T. and with funding from a small foundation I had established, we sent a group of young engineers to Sanga to help the Dogon learn to catch and store rainwater. We wanted to give them what they had never had enough of—water.

In 1975 I married Sue Cott, then Editorial Director of WCBS-TV, New York. Sue had a doctorate in political science and a special interest in African studies. We were married in New York and left immediately for a wedding trip, which began in Dakar where we were guests of President Léopold Senghor of Senegal. I was Chairman of President Senghor's cultural foundation. From Dakar we went on to Bamako, where we were received by our friends in the government of Mali and by my dear friend Hans Guggenheim. We flew on with Hans to Mopti and then bounced our way to Sanga in a Land Rover.

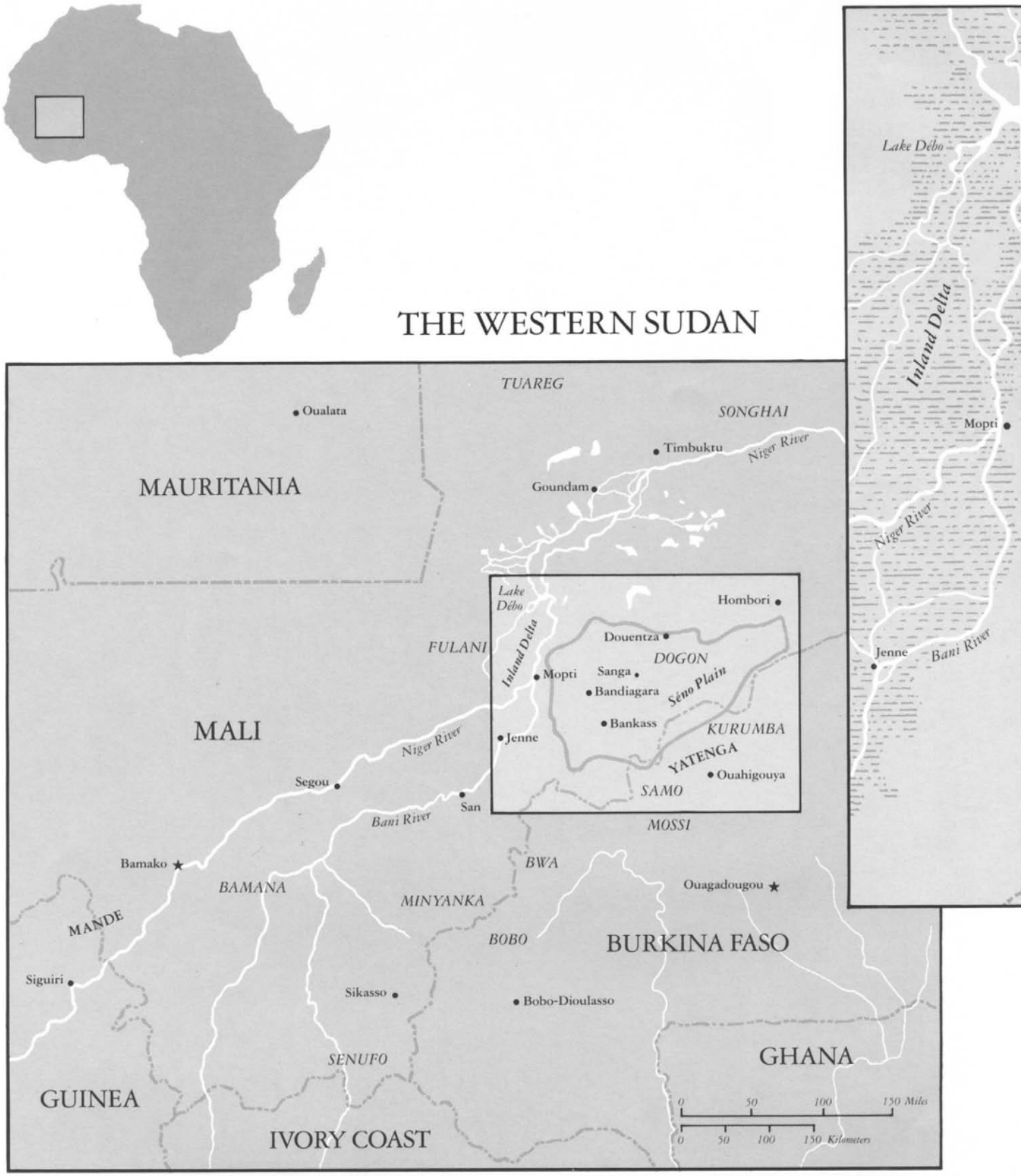
Somehow the people in the village knew we were coming. As our Land Rover arrived in Sanga, the whole village awaited us. The men rushed the Land Rover, lifted me out of it, and began to run around the village with me raised in their arms. Sue was stunned. She feared that I had been seized. It was not until the drums began pounding and the entire village began to dance that she realized that this was a Dogon welcoming. I was brought back to the Land Rover, and there was a formal welcoming ceremony with a speech by Ogobara, who announced that his brother had returned to his village to be married. That was me.

Hans Guggenheim had advised Ogobara of my wish to be married by the Dogon, and the village elders and the *hogon* had agreed. What followed was a three-day wedding ceremony we will never forget. It included the blessing of our marriage by the sacrifice of fourteen chickens whose life force was to pass into our union. The formal marriage ceremony took place in the sacred compound of the *hogon*. It lasted three hours under the fierce sun. Two of these hours were spent by the *hogon* reciting the names of the people of the village whose lives had been saved by the water we had helped the village to store. There were two days of dance, a nighttime feast of lamb roasted on a spit over a fire, a night of singing improvised in our honor by the entire village under a black velvet African sky lit by the brightest stars we had ever seen. We became Dogon when the *hogon* named me Amma Sagou (beloved of God) and named Sue Ya Domio (the beloved of the beloved of God). Those were the main events. What remains impossible to describe is the quality of love that was shown us by every member of the village. We were "family," and we were "home."

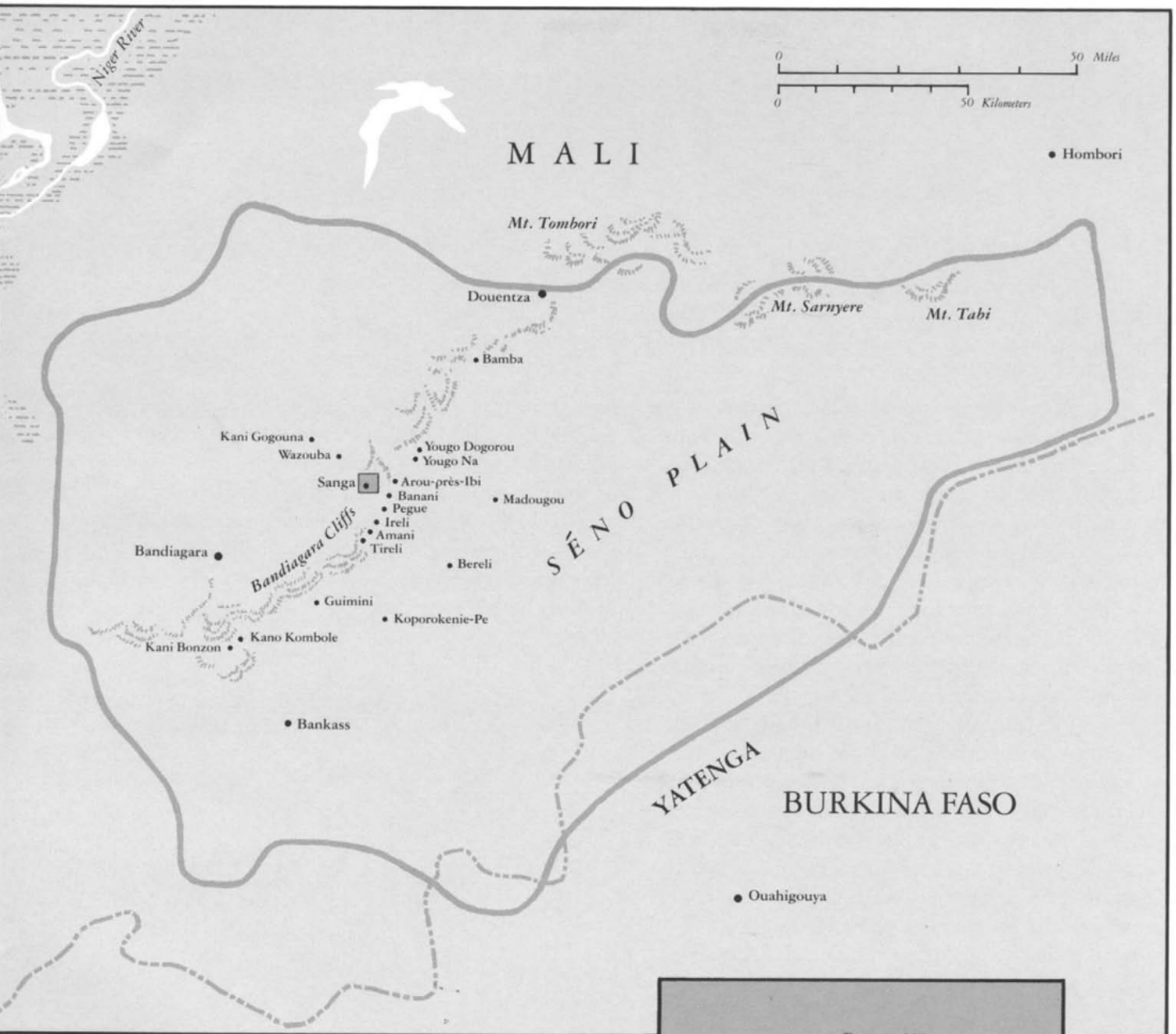
We returned to New York with our gifts, our photographs, our audio tapes, and our memories of having visited a different reality.

The music I couldn't quite hear from my first piece of Dogon art was now loud and clear and beautiful. At last I understood the energy of the art and the vitality of the spirit and life that it represented. Now that I had the music, I no longer needed the art objects. It was then that I decided to give the major part of my collection to The Metropolitan Museum of Art with the hope that in the Museum it will touch and enrich the lives of others as it did mine.

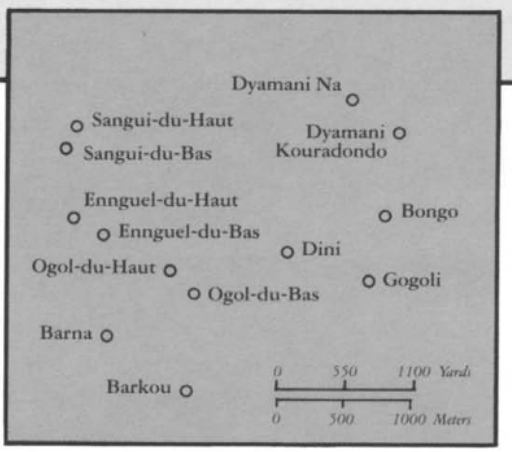
Lester Wunderman
New York



Preceding page: Fig. 2 A baobab tree spreads its branches over the mud-brick buildings of a Dogon village. Photograph by Lester Wunderman.



THE DOGON AREA



THE SANGA REGION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This exhibition and the collection on which it draws owe their existence to the enthusiasm and dedication of Lester Wunderman. His deep admiration for Dogon art has inspired him to share his passion with thousands of others, through exhibitions and publications like this one. I am grateful for his encouragement and ever-willing cooperation.

Many others have also contributed their special skills and talents to this exhibition and its catalogue. Carmel Wilson took the perceptive photographs that capture the three-dimensional qualities of Dogon art. Barbara Bridgers, Manager of the Photograph Studio, smoothly coordinated the photography, and the studio's printers also made a special effort to accommodate the catalogue's schedule. Ellen Howe, John Canonico, and Anne Heywood of the Objects Conservation Department and Christine Giuntini of Textiles Conservation ensured the "health and safety" of many fragile works of art, and Cassandra Hyde, Jeffrey Perhacs, Nancy Reynolds, Jay Vogler, and Alexandra Walcott, expert installers and mount-makers, worked hard to display them properly. Roy Campbell designed the exhibition and Don Roberts and James Dowtin facilitated the objects' many movements during the installation of the exhibition. Ross Day of the Metropolitan Museum's Robert Goldwater Library helped locate many hard-to-find publications, and Virginia-Lee Webb of the Library's Photograph Study Collection also provided valuable assistance. As graduate assistants in the Department of Primitive Art in the summer of 1986, Joanne Pillsbury, Carol Thompson, and Sarah Travis thoroughly researched and cataloged many of the objects included here. Barbara Burn, editor, Michael Shroyer, designer, Jean Levitt, production, and Jean Wagner, who edited the bibliography, carefully supervised the preparation of the catalogue. Finally, Victoria Southwell tirelessly and cheerfully typed the manuscript and helped in countless ways, ensuring its timely completion. The efforts of all are deeply appreciated.

Kate Ezra

INTRODUCTION

Dogon country is crowded too enchantingly with sanctuaries, ritual objects, sacred places of all kinds, the minds of the men who live there crossed by too tight a network of myths and beliefs, their life tied too continually to a fabric of rites, for a notice such as this one to provide an overview, much less a complete account (Leiris, 1933: 26).[1]

So began one of the first discussions of sculpture and masks used in Dogon rituals, in a report of the findings of the first anthropological investigation of the Dogon area, Marcel Griaule's "Mission Dakar-Djibouti" sponsored by the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. Since that time more words have been written about the Dogon than almost any other people in Africa, but the tone that characterizes the essay—of amazement at the complexity of Dogon religious beliefs and the sculptures associated with them and of apology at not being able to do them justice—has not disappeared. The Dogon captured the imagination of European and American artists and intellectuals in the 1930s with the austere beauty and isolation of their environment, the power of their sculpture, and the richness of their rituals, but we have still not fully understood the history and meaning of their art.

The Dogon live in one of West Africa's most spectacular landscapes. Their home is the Bandiagara Escarpment, a row of cliffs stretching 125 miles from southwest to northeast, parallel to the Niger River. The steep cliffs, some of them almost two thousand feet high, are cut in massive blocks separated by narrow gorges, their sharp-edged faces punctuated by caves. The cliffs make access to Dogon villages difficult, and even though the center of Dogon country is only about 100 miles from the ancient commercial city of Jenne, visitors to Dogon country since the beginning of the twentieth century have stressed the sense of isolation and remoteness that pervades the cliffs. According to oral traditions, the Dogon chose to settle on the cliffs precisely because of their inaccessibility. They have provided a place of refuge from attacks by neighboring ethnic groups, which over the past five hundred years have included the Mossi, Songhai, and Fulani.

Most Dogon are farmers, who eke out their subsistence under the harshest conditions. There is no permanent source of water on the cliffs, and rainfall is minimal—only 20 to 28 inches per year—falling only between the months of June and October. The soil on the rocky cliffs and sandy plain is also very poor, and it must constantly be built up and enriched. Although the Dogon have developed excellent farming techniques that are well suited to their difficult environment (Gallais, 1965), they nevertheless seek spiritual help to ensure their livelihood; prayers for rain and healthy crops of the staple grains dominate Dogon rituals. It is in the context of these rituals that Dogon art can be found.

The Dogon number about 250,000 people today. There are about 700 Dogon villages, most with fewer than 500 inhabitants, and very few with more than 1,000. Some Dogon live above the cliffs on the plateau, which slopes gradually downward toward the Niger River; others live in the vast, flat Séno Plain, which stretches from the foot of the cliffs to the border of Burkina Faso. The population is densest along the scree, the rocky, irregular region at the foot of the cliffs, particularly in the region of Sanga, in the center of Dogon country.

It was in Sanga, whose name means "ornament," that a team of French researchers known as the "Mission Dakar-Djibouti" arrived in 1931 to study Dogon culture. Since then, the group's leader, Marcel

Fig. 3 The low, flat-roofed houses and taller, thatched-roofed granaries of this Dogon village have straight-sided, geometric forms that echo the sheer rock walls of the Bandiagara cliffs behind them. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, Sanga region, March 1972; courtesy of National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Griaule, and other members of his research team[2] returned there many times, generating an enormous body of literature about the Dogon. Griaule and his colleagues have published well over two hundred articles and books about the Dogon; some of them, including Germaine Dieterlen, continue their research on Dogon culture even today, more than fifty years after their initial visit. A second generation of researchers has arisen, making original contributions to our knowledge of the Dogon and analyzing the work of the earlier scholars.[3]

Griaule and his colleagues made an enormous contribution to the field of African studies. What began as an attempt to document in minute detail the techniques, material culture, social organization, and religious beliefs of the Dogon (Griaule, 1933) led them to become advocates for the importance of African thought, on a level with that of other major world civilizations (Griaule, 1947a). Beginning in 1947 with his famous conversations with Ogotemmêli, an old Dogon hunter designated by the council of elders and priests in Sanga to instruct Griaule in deeper levels of Dogon culture than his previous fieldwork had broached, Griaule's research concentrated on exposing the inner workings of Dogon thought (Griaule, 1965). What he found was a vast body of myths pertaining to the creation of the universe, the struggle between order and disorder, and the place of mankind within it. This mythic structure was seen as underpinning all aspects of Dogon life, including crafts and occupations (such as weaving, agriculture, and the forge), the layout of the village and the home, the rules of marriage, kinship, and social interaction, and the cycle of ritual activities that punctuates the Dogon calendar. In publications that followed Griaule's encounter with Ogotemmêli, Dogon culture is pre-

sented as a network of correspondences in which man-made and natural objects, activities, and beliefs are inextricably linked through the overwhelming power of Dogon myth.[4]

Griaule and his colleagues also included art in their construction of Dogon culture, believing that "the smallest everyday object may reveal in its form or decoration a conscious reflection of a complex cosmogony" (Dieterlen, in Griaule, 1965: xiv; Dieterlen, 1957: 139). The objects produced by the Dogon—ranging from household objects such as door locks, shutters, bowls, and stools, to personal ornaments such as bracelets and pendants, and from masks worn in funerary rituals to human figurative sculptures placed on altars—are all viewed by them as materializations of mythic events, characters, and ideas (e.g., Griaule, 1951; Dieterlen, 1970).

These findings, while emphasizing the coherence and complexity of Dogon culture and art, have not proved entirely convincing to Africanists, anthropologists, and scholars concerned with African art. To some critics, Griaule's is too idealized a view of Dogon culture, lacking the irregularities and texture of real life. To others, his conclusions appear to be based on a limited number of Dogon collaborators, like Ogotemmêli, whose individual perceptions of Dogon culture may not always be shared by others in their ethnic group. The Griaule school has been criticized for its lack of historical consciousness in treating Dogon society as a timeless, unchanging entity. The mythological system described by Griaule and Dieterlen may not be the coherent network of correspondences they claim it to be, for some readers have found internal contradictions and inconsistencies that make the system less useful as an interpretive tool. Finally, it has been suggested that the literature about the Dogon is more a reflection of the thought patterns of the French researchers than of the people being studied.[5]

Some of these same criticisms have been applied to studies of Dogon art. Despite the profundity of the meanings attributed to Dogon sculptures by Griaule and others, some critics have felt that their conclusions lack the richness and depth that come from closely examining works of art in context.[6] According to this view, symbolic interpretations should be bolstered with data about the ways in which objects are handled and placed, worn and danced; about the prayers and songs that are voiced when these objects are used in rituals; and about the values, training, and goals of the artists who made them. This type of data abounds in Griaule's early study of Dogon masks (1938), an exhaustive work which anticipates in many ways the issues that would come to concern students of African art decades later. Yet it is curiously lacking in his later studies.

Fig. 4 Because of the shortage of flat land available for construction on the Bandiagara cliffs, the rooms of a Dogon compound are irregular in shape and arrangement and staggered in height. Photograph by Arthur Tress, 1967.

The goal of this catalogue is to begin to redress this imbalance, by providing whenever possible the real-life context of Dogon art rather than relying on mythological interpretations unless they are supported by the ways in which the object is used or viewed by the Dogon themselves. Although original fieldwork is necessary to complete this endeavor, the vast literature on Dogon culture provides a rich bank of data with which to begin. Descriptions of rituals, of house and village plans, of altar configurations, and of domestic life are sprinkled throughout past studies of

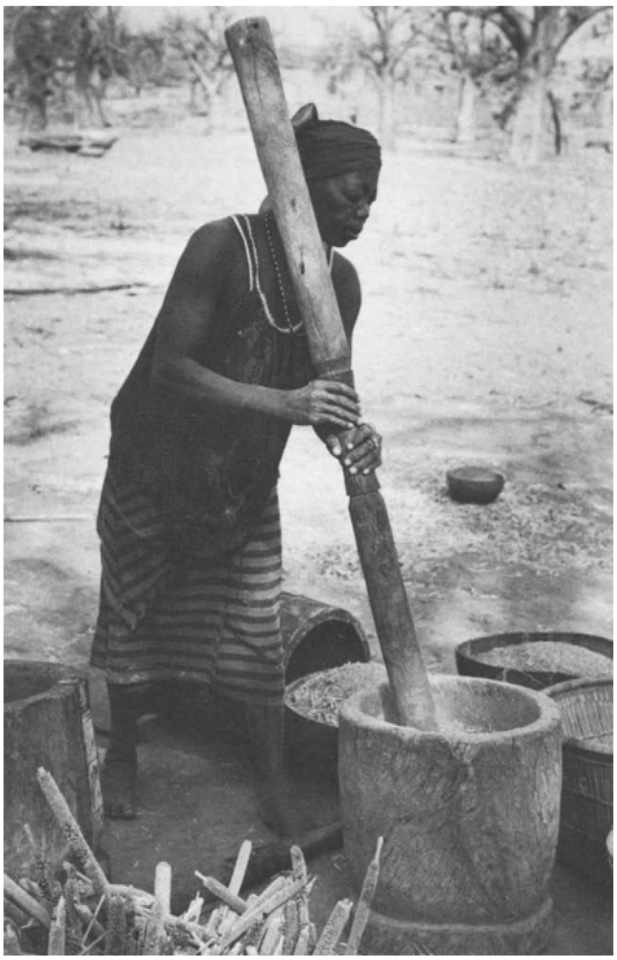


Fig. 5 This Dogon woman is pounding millet, the staple of the Dogon diet, with a mortar and pestle; the unpounded heads of millet are visible in the foreground. Photograph by Lester Wunderman.

the Dogon; these descriptions mention sculpture and other objects, although the works may not be the focus of attention. By gleaning these references to objects from the existing literature and by paying attention to the contexts in which Dogon art appears, we may come closer to understanding its meaning and place in Dogon society.

Dogon Religion and Cosmogony

Dogon art is created primarily for religious purposes, to be placed in shrines or to be used in rituals. According to Dogon cosmogony, Amma is the creator of the universe and of all life in it. However, Dogon religious beliefs are concerned less with Amma than with the spirits of various types of ancestors, intermediaries between the living and the ultimate forces of the universe. The ancestors include deceased members of one's lineage or clan, whose spirits are usually enshrined in altars in each lineage head's house, and who are also the focus of rites of the men's mask society, called Ava. Other types of ancestors invoked in Dogon religion include Lebe, one of the eight original ancestors of all mankind, and the various *binu*, or "immortal" ancestors, who are revered by an entire clan. Most Dogon rituals are related to one of these three types of ancestors.

Ancestors who are deceased family members are called *vageũ*, "those who are far away."[7] Their worship is presided over by the head of a lineage, the *ginna bana*, who maintains the altars dedicated to the ancestors in his residence, the *ginna*. Sacrifices to individual ancestors are made whenever the need arises by the ancestor's *nani*, the descendant who has inherited his or her spiritual principles. Collective sacrifices are made by the lineage head twice a year, at rituals called *bago di*, a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest, and at *vageũ bulu*, "to revive the ancestors," which takes place several weeks later.

Before a deceased family member is enshrined in the lineage's collective *vageũ* altar, rituals concerned with his soul are performed by the men's mask society. All Dogon men belong to Ava, which performs at men's funerals and at their *dama*, a ceremony that takes place several years after the funeral. Ava members also participate in *sigi*, a ceremony that occurs every sixty years; the last *sigi* was held from 1966 to 1974, because it takes eight years for the ritual cycle to be passed from one region of Dogon country to the next. Just as funerals and *dama* ceremonies are concerned with individual deaths, *sigi* commemorates the first death and re-creates the "great mask," *imina na*, made to contain the force that was released by it.

In some accounts of the Dogon myths describing this first death, the ancestor who died is called Lebe, which is also the name of the important Dogon cult concerned primarily with agriculture and the renewal of the earth and its vegetation. According to Dogon myth, after the ancestor Lebe was buried, his descendants decided to move. Wanting to take their ancestor's remains with them, they dug up his grave and found instead of bones a living snake, evidence of Lebe's regenerative powers. They carried earth from

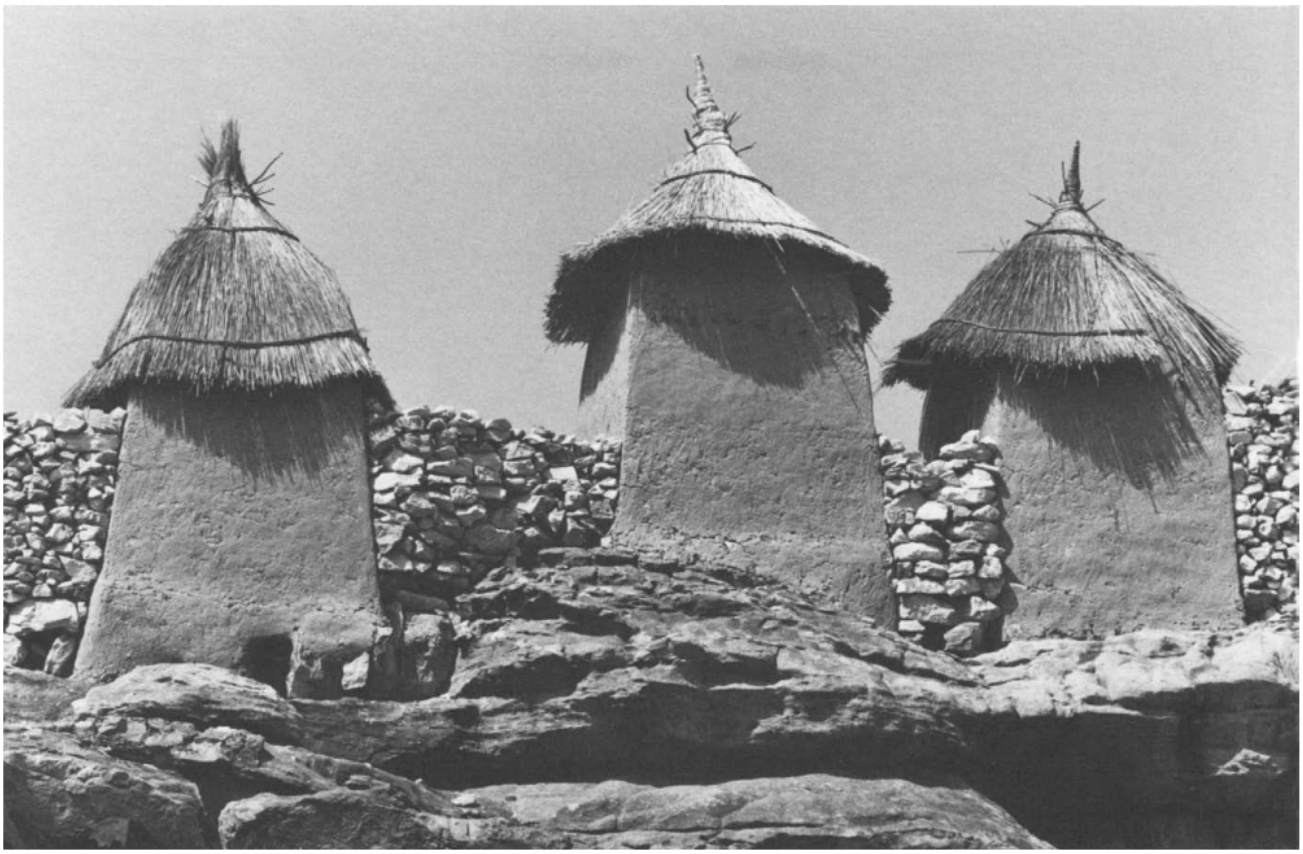


Fig. 6 These three thatched-roofed, mud-brick granaries are connected by a stone wall. Granaries hold reserves of food from one harvest to the next. Photograph by Lester Wunderman.

Lebe's grave with them, and in each new village they established an altar, called Lebe, incorporating in it some of the life force contained in the sacred earth. *Hogons*, the supreme religious and political leaders of every region in Dogon country, are the priests of Lebe. One of the principal rituals involving Lebe is *bulu*, whose very name means "to revivify or resuscitate." *Bulu* is celebrated every year at the beginning of the planting season and involves the cooperation of the *hogon*, priest of Lebe, as well as the priests of other "immortal" ancestors, the *binu*.

The *binu* are ancestors who lived in the mythic times before the appearance of death among mankind. Their name is short for *binu yay*, meaning "gone and come back"—they have "gone" to the world of the spirits but have "come back" to help their descendants. *Binu* often make themselves known to their descendants in the form of an animal that interceded on behalf of the clan during its founding or migration and thus becomes the clan's totem. Either directly or through this animal intermediary, the *binu* provides the descendants with a symbol of the alliance between them in the form of a *dugo*, a pendant made of a stone, bead, or metal ring. The *dugo* is worn by the *binukedine*, the *binu* priest, who has the ability to communicate with the spirit while in a trance. Some *binu* are allied with an entire clan, whereas others are devoted to individuals. The *binu* is a source of power and protection for its descendants, who appeal to it for prosperity, fertility, rain, and abundant crops at the *bulu*, or planting ceremony, and at harvest rituals.

This outline of Dogon religion gives only the barest idea of the number and complexity of the altars and sacred places that exist throughout Dogon country. The village and countryside are spotted with personal and family altars, rain-making altars, hunters' shrines, market altars, and ponds, stones, caves, and earthen mounds designated as sacred to various mythic

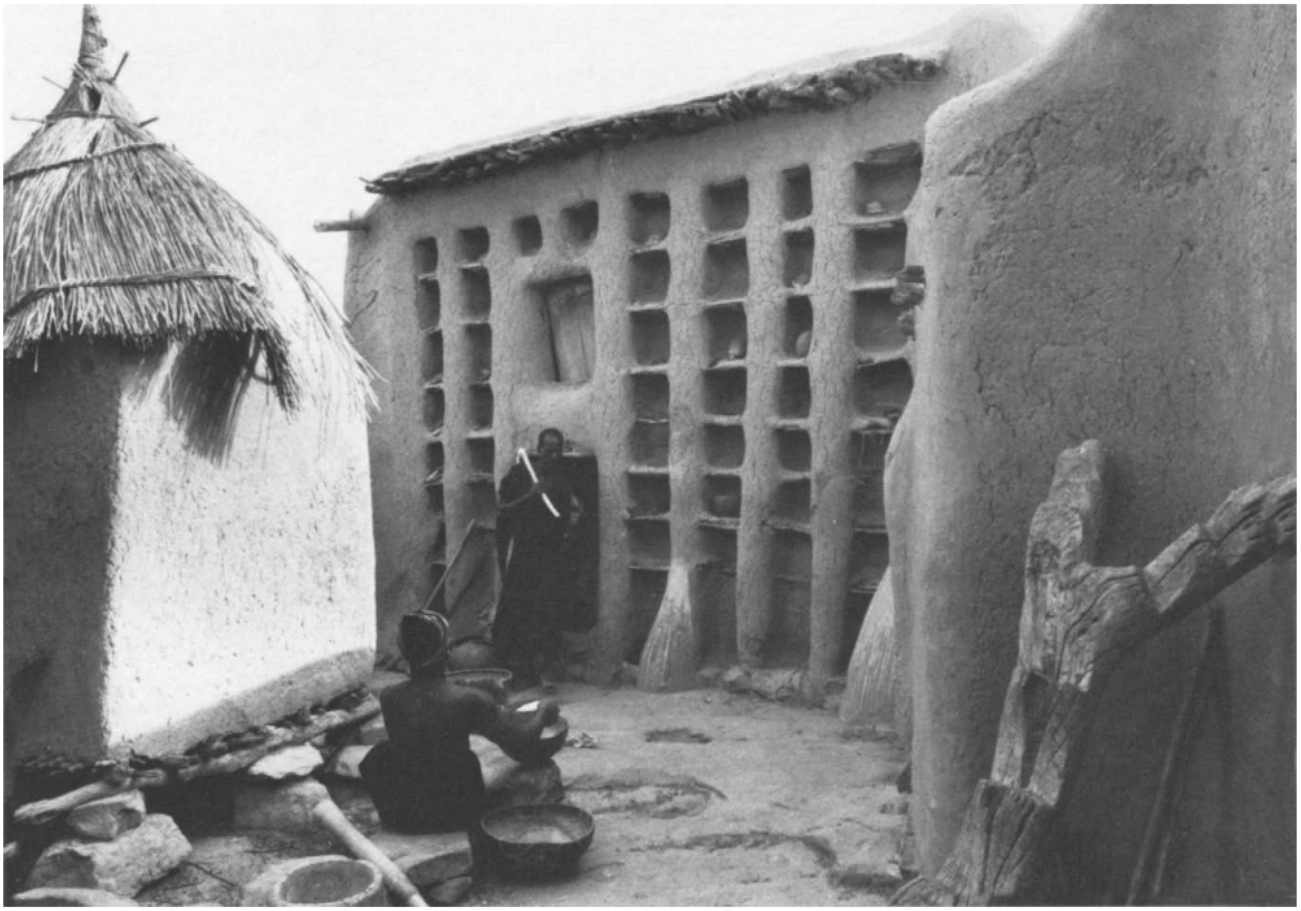


Fig. 7 The *ginna*, residence of the head of a Dogon lineage, is characterized by parallel rows of niches in its facade. Ancestor altars are sometimes stored in the upper story of the *ginna*, access to which is gained through the wooden shutter above the door. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, Ogol du Haut, June 1970; courtesy of National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

beings. In the final period of Griaule's research on the Dogon, after his conversations with Ogotemmêli in 1947 (Griaule, 1965), he and his colleagues came to believe all of these sacred places were related to episodes in the Dogon myth of the creation of the world, in particular to a being called Nommo. Although Nommo, in the form of a water spirit, had been discussed in some of the early publications about the Dogon (Griaule, 1938: 5; Dieterlen and Ganay, 1942), he later appears as the central figure in Dogon cosmology, ritual, and art.[8]

Nommo was the first living being created by Amma and he soon multiplied to become four pairs of twins. One of these twin Nommos rebelled against the order established by Amma. In order to purify the universe and restore order to it, Amma sacrificed another Nommo, whose body was cut up and scattered throughout the universe, just as sacrificial meat is divided and distributed at a Dogon ritual. This distribution of Nommo and his subsequent resurrection and resuscitation are seen as the source for the proliferation of *binu* and other altars, as well as the model for the cult of Lebe, the *bulu* ritual of renewal, and the yearly sacrifices on the *vageũ* altars. From parts of the sacrificed Nommo Amma then created the eight ancestors of mankind, called Amma Serou, Lebe Serou, Binou Serou, Dyongou Serou, and their four female twins. In the final stage of creation, when order is restored to earth, Nommo, the eight primordial ancestors, and everything that would be needed for human life was put into an ark and sent to earth. There Nommos continue to serve as the monitors of the

universe, the ancestors of mankind, and the masters of water.

The importance of Nommo in the cosmogony presented by Griaule and Dieterlen is reflected in their interpretations of Dogon art. Almost all human images are identified as Nommo and are related to various aspects of his existence and relationship with Amma and with mankind. These include freestanding figures, figures carved in relief on many kinds of objects, and the abstract geometric designs that decorate their surfaces. In such a view of Dogon art, uniformity and coherence are valued over variety and particularity. A somewhat different view of Dogon art emerges when the contexts of the works are examined and interpretations are based on the forms of the sculptures and on the uses to which they are put.

Dogon Sculpture and Masks

Dogon art presents a broad range of object types and styles. Among the human figures alone, some are well over life-size, while others are barely a few inches in height. Their repertoire of gestures is also varied, and includes figures standing, kneeling, sitting, or riding, raising one or both arms in a variety of poses, and holding or wearing articles related to their gender, age, occupation, or social status. In style they vary from full-volumed, sensitively modeled sculptures that are highly descriptive in their details to works that are reduced to abstract geometric shapes stripped of all but the barest references to human anatomy. The surfaces of Dogon sculptures also suggest that they are treated in a variety of ways and may therefore have a range of meanings. While some works are smooth, oiled, and polished, others are thickly coated with sacrificial materials, sometimes to the point of obscuring their sculptural form. The range of styles and imagery seen in Dogon sculpture suggests that they embody richer and more varied references than the simple identification as images of Nommo would encompass. Even if the ultimate meaning of Dogon art depends upon the concept of Nommo, as Griaule and Dieterlen and their followers propose, this meaning can only be enriched by adding to it the many other levels of meaning that arise from the particular settings in which the objects are located.

The Dogon place wood figures depicting men and women on many different kinds of altars, most of which are dedicated to ancestors, either real or mythical. Although figurative sculptures, called *dege*, are perhaps the most interesting types of Dogon art, varied in form and rich in imagery, they are also among the least well documented. Few altars have been described in detail or illustrated; those that have been described do not suggest any consistent pattern linking a particular style of figure or a specific posture or gesture with any one kind of altar. There is also little information with which to identify the persons represented by the figures.

Each lineage possesses an altar containing figurative sculpture, which is dedicated to its founders and to subsequent members who have died, known as *vageũ*. In recounting the myth of the first person to die in human form, Griaule tells of how a wooden sculpture representing the dead man was carved in order to provide a support for his soul and his vital force (*nyama*), which were released at his death. The figure was placed on the man's rooftop terrace along with a pottery bowl for libations. As death spread throughout the land, similar figures and bowls were placed on altars established by each lineage (Griaule, 1938: 171–72; Dieterlen, 1941: 18, 22, 140; also Desplagnes, 1907: 273). Photographs and drawings of *vageũ* altars show rather simplified, even cylindrical, sticklike figures leaning against the wall of the shrine (Dieterlen, 1941: pls. Vb and Vc, fig. 10). Along with the figures one also sees pottery bowls and small cups in which sacrificial liquids are offered to the ancestors and small notched ladders so the spirits can climb to the rooftop altar; iron hooks (*gobo*), cylinders of red ocher, iron ornaments, and pots of roots soaking in water are kept there also and are used in healing. Sacrifices are performed collectively on all these objects at planting and harvest times, as well as by individuals who have inherited the souls of particular ancestors. The altars are kept in the *ginna*, or lineage head's house, of which there are several in each village. An altar can be found on the upper story of the house, in a corner of the living quarters, in the granary, in the courtyard, or even in a separate structure nearby (Paulme, 1940: 109–11; Dieterlen, 1941: 141–47).

Not all of a family's deceased members are commemorated on the *vageũ* altar. The souls of women who died during pregnancy or childbirth are consid-

ered dangerous, and the forces that cause such deaths are particularly contagious (Paulme, 1940: 531–36; Dieterlen, 1941: 195–205; Ortoli, 1941). The souls of these women, called *yaũpilũ* (literally, "white women"), are enshrined in a separate sanctuary, usually in a cave outside the village, and are cared for by a priest who is a skilled healer. Such a sanctuary contains the various pottery bowls, wooden sticks, and staffs found on *vageũ* altars, as well as anthropomorphic wood figures representing both men and women (Ganay, 1941: 132; Dieterlen, 1941: 199, pls. XIIIa and XIIIb; Dieterlen, 1981: 16). Every year, sacrifices are made to this altar by those who have been cured of illnesses caused by the spirits of the dead women, and the figures are completely smeared with the blood of the slaughtered sheep and goats.

While the *vageũ* and *yaũpilũ* ancestors are actual deceased members of the family, the *binu* in whose shrines figure sculpures are also found belong to the mythic era when humans were immortal (Dieterlen, 1941: 216–27; Ganay, 1942). *Binu* shrines or sanctuaries are separate structures built in the courtyard of the *ginna*. Each one contains an altar on which the wooden figures are found, leaning against the wall of the shrine. Small bowls, miniature ladders, iron hooks and bracelets, and L-shaped wooden *domolo* staffs are also placed in *binu* shrines (Dieterlen, 1941: 220; Ganay, 1942: 13–14). The sculptures are often mentioned in the myths describing the ancestor's initial contact with his clan, in which he provides a sculpture along with other objects as tokens of his alliance with his descendants (Ganay, 1941: 114, 123). The sculptures on *binu* shrines take a variety of forms and sizes. Although in some cases they appear to be simple cylinders, in others they are less abstract and have more varied and descriptive human and animal imagery (Ganay, 1942: 13–14; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 381–85, 484–85). The *binu* sculptures are said to represent either the *binu* himself or his first priest (Dieterlen, 1941: 220), but it has also been suggested that they represent various aspects of Nommo, who is considered the ultimate source of the *binu*'s spiritual force (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 381).

In addition to altars dedicated to the ancestors, some Dogon figures are placed on altars made to augment and strengthen a living individual's personal force, or *nyama*. One such altar is the *kutogolo*, which is dedicated to a person's own head, *ku*, the seat of his or her thought and will. The *kutogolo* consists of a ball of earth mixed with seeds into which iron hooks, clay pots, and occasional small wooden figures are stuck (Dieterlen, 1941: 77–79, pl. XIc). The *bala* is an altar made for a left-handed person, who is believed to have special powers in his or her left hand. These altars, too, are made of balls of earth into which small wooden figures, some of them with raised arms, are stuck along with iron hooks and bracelets (Dieterlen, 1941: 83–84, pl. XId; N'Diaye, 1972: n. 11). Both *kutogolo* and *bala* altars are kept in the niches in the facade of a *ginna*, or in the corner of a storeroom. Some Dogon blacksmiths and hunters also have individual altars, which often include figurative sculpture (Paris, Musée Guimet, 1959: 116; Dieterlen, 1965: 15).

Dogon rain-making altars, called *andugo*, have also been found with figure sculptures. The *andugo* are the focus of sacrifices to Nommo, who as Master of Water is manifested in every body of water on earth, including the rain falling from the sky. These altars can be located on a rooftop terrace, in a courtyard, on the outskirts of a village, or in a separate sanctuary; some are portable and can be carried to fields in particular need of rain. The altars consist of a pile of ancient stone tools—"thunderstones" believed to have fallen from the sky—into which iron hooks and wooden figures may be inserted. These figures are said to represent Nommo. Judging from examples in the few published photographs and descriptions, they vary in size, style, and iconography; in one altar an androgynous seated figure and a figure covering his face with his hands, as well as several others, were noted (Dieterlen and Ganay, 1942: 30–40, pl. III).

In contrast to the paucity of information concerning Dogon figure sculptures and their limited visibility in sanctuaries and ancestor shrines, Dogon masks are seen in great numbers at publicly performed rituals, and consequently they have been studied in great detail. Marcel Griaule's book, *Masques dogons* (1938), contains lengthy descriptions of the masks, including their myths of origins, their function in society, the techniques for making them, and the music, songs, dances, and costumes associated with them. *Masques dogons*, one of the earliest anthropological studies of African art, remains one of the

Fig. 8 *Binu* sanctuaries are identified by the turrets and mounds that rise from their facades. In this example an iron *gobo* hook has been inserted next to the turret on the left, and several *domolo* staffs are stacked in the center above the door. Sacrifices of blood and millet porridge have dripped down the front of the building. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, Ogol du Haut, March 1972; courtesy of National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

most thorough and complete.

Dogon myth attributes the origin of masks to beings called Andoumboulou. The first masks were made out of fiber, and although they were eventually acquired by Dogon women—and later by Dogon men—their function did not become apparent until after the appearance of death among the Dogon. The first ancestor to die did so while in the form of a snake, part of the process of transformation into a spirit that was practiced until that time. When people became aware of the negative effects of the *nyama* released by death, it was decided to carve a mask to serve as a support for the *nyama*. This mask, in the form of a snake like the dead ancestor, was the initial *imina na*, "great mask," or "mother of masks," used in the *sigi* ceremony, which commemorates this mythic event every sixty years. Although its face is in the form of a mask, the "great mask" is never actually worn; rather it is displayed in a stationary position or while being carried. In each Dogon village a new "great mask" is made every sixty years for the celebration of *sigi*.

After the initial death that prompted the making of the "great mask," other deaths followed, and measures had to be taken to cope with the *nyama* released. At first, ancestor altars were erected, with wood figures serving as the repository for the spiritual forces, but as the deaths proliferated this was not sufficient. Masks were then made for *dama* rituals in which the souls of the dead are permanently escorted out of the village and sent on their way to the afterlife.

Dogon masks are intimately bound up with rituals concerned with death. A small group of masks—four fiber *bede* masks and a carved wood mask called *sirige*—are donned for dances held two days after the burial of men who have participated in a *sigi* cere-

Fig. 9 Young men participating in a procession during the *sigi* ritual carry T-shaped *dolaba* staffs and calabashes. Photograph by Arthur Tress, 1967.

mony. This part of the funerary ritual is called *baga bundo*. The dancers wearing the *bede*, or female masks, kneel next to the funerary blanket that is displayed in the public square; they pound the earth on either side of it, a gesture that women mourners perform in other stages of the funeral. The wearer of the *sirige* mask also performs a similar gesture of mourning and respect, leaning down so that the tip of the mask—often fifteen feet high—will touch the ground.

Several years after the actual funeral, the *dama* rite is performed. A *dama* requires lengthy and costly preparations, and one of its functions is to enhance the prestige and reputation of the deceased and of his descendants through these elaborate preparations. When the necessary food has been produced and collected, new wooden masks are carved and fibers are prepared and dyed for their costumes and for fiber hood masks. The *dama* ritual itself lasts six days, during which time the mask society performs in the village plaza, on the terrace of the deceased's house, and in the *hogon*'s sacred fields. Griaule witnessed seventy-four masks at the *dama* held for an ordinary man in 1935; for a "great *dama*," performed for a man who held an important rank in his lineage, several hundred masked dancers may perform. The soul of the deceased, localized in the handle of his hoe and in a container of millet beer, is removed from the village by throwing these spirit containers into the bush. When performed for women, the *dama* does not include masked dancing, except in the case of the *yasigine*, the sole female member of the men's mask society.

The variety of Dogon masks is overwhelming. Griaule's informants listed more than seventy-eight different types, representing mammals, reptiles, birds, humans, objects, and abstract concepts. They are made of both carved wood and knotted fiber. The fiber masks represent primarily human characters, such as Dogon village specialists (*hogon*, *binukedine*, black-

smith, leather worker, European doctor) and their wives, or men and women of other ethnic groups, such as Bamana, Fulani, and Tuareg. The wooden masks for the most part depict animals and birds. Together the masks may be seen as a summary of the people, animals, and things that constitute the Dogon world, a visual accounting of the return to order in the universe following the disruption caused by death.

Dogon sculpture and masks are made by blacksmiths, who also work in iron. There are two groups of smiths in the Dogon area, the *jemo* who live on the plain, and their former slaves, the *iru*, who live on the plateau and who were taught by the *jemo* to work iron. As in other West African ethnic groups, the blacksmiths' mastery of earth, air, and fire, and their ability to make the iron tools on which Dogon farmers depend, accords them a privileged place in Dogon society. Both *jemo* and *iru* serve as intermediaries and peacemakers, not only between other Dogon, but also between the living and the ancestors and between mankind and Amma, especially in order to bring rain (Paulme, 1940: 182–88; Dieterlen and Ganay, 1942: 6–8; Dieterlen, 1982: 76). The respect granted to blacksmiths is said to derive also from their role in the myth of creation, in which the first blacksmith descended from heaven to bring mankind fire, iron, and seeds for cultivating (Griaule, 1938: 48–51). As a result, blacksmiths are still praised with the phrases *dogo bana*, "master of the Dogon," and *jama segu*, "dense crowd," a reference to the multitudes who sought to benefit from the smith's gifts (Ganay, 1942: 10; Dieterlen, 1982: 76). While much has been written about the symbolic elements of blacksmiths' activities among the Dogon, little attention has been paid to the practical aspects of their work, such as their training, techniques, styles, patronage, aesthetics, and the contributions of the individual smiths to the development of Dogon art.

Fig. 10 Two participants in *sigi* lean on their *dolaba* staffs while resting. Their costume consists of brilliant white cloth caps, cotton trousers, and numerous ornaments—armbands, bracelets, necklaces—that are normally worn by women. Photograph by Arthur Tress, 1967.

Fig. 11 These dancers are wearing cross-shaped, wooden *kanaga* masks. Their costume includes cowrie-embroidered vests, cotton trousers, and fiber skirts, ruffs, and armbands. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, Sanga region, December 1970; courtesy of National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

The History of Dogon Art

The earliest descriptions and collections of Dogon art were not made until the beginning of the twentieth century (Desplagnes, 1907; New York, Center for African Art, 1985: nos. 23, 26), making it difficult to reconstruct the history of Dogon art. However, the dry climate of the Bandiagara cliffs, and the protected inner spaces of the caves in which Dogon art is sometimes stored, created conditions more favorable to the preservation of wood sculpture than in other parts of Africa. The corpus of Dogon sculpture may therefore include works that vary widely in date. In reconstructing the history and development of Dogon art, information can be drawn from Dogon oral traditions, archaeological investigations, and the internal evidence provided by the objects themselves.

According to oral traditions collected by Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, the Dogon originally came from the area known as Mande, the center of the Mali Empire founded in the thirteenth century in southwestern Mali and northeastern Guinea (Griaule, 1938: 28; Dieterlen, 1941: 3–8; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 26–33). However, the Mande origin of the Dogon is difficult to reconcile with their language; although the Dogon use many words borrowed from Mande-speakers such as the Bamana, their own language has been classed with those of the Voltaic peoples (Calame-Griaule, 1968: ix–x).

Not all the Dogon migrated from Mande directly to the region of the Bandiagara cliffs. Some apparently settled first in Yatenga, in what is now Burkina Faso, which may account for the similarities between some Dogon art, particularly masks, and that of the Mossi who live in Yatenga. The Dogon were forced to flee their homes in Yatenga by the Mossi around 1480 (Dieterlen, 1941: 6; Munich, Fred und Jens Jahn Galerie, 1983: 6), and the Bandiagara cliffs became a place of refuge from these attacks and from subsequent ones by Songhai, Fulani, and Tukulor raiders.

When the Dogon arrived on the Bandiagara cliffs, according to their oral traditions, they encountered a group of people they called Tellem, who were in turn forced to abandon their settlements on the cliffs (Desplagnes, 1907: 192; Griaule, 1938: 28, 157; Paulme, 1940: 19; Dieterlen, 1941: 6, 51–53, 71–72). The existence of the Tellem has been confirmed by archaeological investigations of caves with their remains, located in the cliffs above Dogon villages (Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977). Their skeletons show the Tellem to be ethnically distinct both from the Dogon and from the peoples of Burkina Faso, where the Dogon believe the Tellem fled. Excavations by Dutch archaeologist Rogier Bedaux indicate that the Tellem inhabited the cliffs from the eleventh century to the fifteenth, when the Dogon arrived. No Tellem living quarters have been found in the caves, but the sites contain granaries for food

storage, probably for use during times of attack, and areas where communal burials and funerary rituals were performed.

Among the objects the archaeologists found in the Tellem caves were four examples of wooden figurative sculpture. Descriptions of these sculptures suggest that they vary in style from "very abstract" to "rather naturalistic" (Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977: 76). Illustrations, not of these four sculptures but of examples said to be similar to them, show them to be related to many sculptures removed from the Tellem caves in the 1950s, without proper documentation of their sites or their arrangements within them (Langlois, 1954; London, Hanover Gallery, 1959). These latter sculptures are characterized by simplified, geometric forms and thick crusts of sacrificial materials. Although sculptures like these have also been found in use on Dogon altars, there arose the view that such sculptures represented the work of Tellem artists and thus were made before the fifteenth century. They were distinguished from more complex and descriptive sculptures that were attributed to the Dogon themselves.

The difficulties with this view of Dogon and Tellem sculpture have been apparent almost since it was proposed (Elisofon and Fagg, 1958: no. 11; Fagg and Plass, 1964: 100). Rather than such clear differences, there is a continuity between the two styles, seen in the gestures depicted, the facial features, the reduction of the body to geometric shapes, and the use of sacrificial materials. The Dogon themselves tend to identify as "Tellem" any works whose origins are unfamiliar to them, regardless of their age, style, or actual origin in the Tellem caves (Paulme, 1977: 11–12). In one study, a Dogon man from Sanga, when interviewed in Paris, identified as "Tellem" a group of sculptures in the "Dogon" style that included types of objects previously unknown to him, as well as sculptures made completely outside the Dogon area (Laude, 1964: 49–50). He also con-

Fig. 12 Dancers wearing *kanaga* masks are joined by others wearing fiber and cowrie-shell masks depicting Fulani women with characteristic high-crested hairstyles. Photograph by Eliot Elisofon, Sanga region, October 1959; courtesy of National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

firmed that the Dogon re-use on their own altars sculptures they find in the caves or have carvers make replicas of them.

This information, which suggests the difficulties involved in distinguishing Tellem and Dogon work on the basis of style, was confirmed in another study, supervised by Tamara Northern at the Museum of Primitive Art in New York, in which radiocarbon dates for a group of "Tellem" and "Dogon" sculptures were analyzed. The results show that there is no consistent correlation between the style of the objects tested and their age (Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977: 76–77; Munich, Fred und Jens Jahn Galerie, 1983: 6). For this reason, the objects in this catalogue have not been classified according to their date.

However, some evidence as to the history of Dogon art is provided by another group of Dogon sculptures. These works have been likened, on the basis of their style, facial features, body types, garments, attributes, and gestures, to terracotta sculptures that have been excavated since the 1940s in the Inland Delta region of the Niger River, only 100 miles west of the Bandiagara cliffs. Many of these terracotta sculptures have been dated by the thermoluminescence technique (Grunne, 1980); a few have been found in controlled archaeological contexts which have been dated by the carbon-14 method (McIntosh and McIntosh, 1979). Their dates range from the eleventh to the seventeenth century. The stylistic similarities between the Dogon wood figures and the Inland Niger Delta terracottas, and the fact that a few of the Dogon wood sculptures have also been dated by carbon-14 with results similar to those of the terracottas, suggest that they may date from the same period (Grunne, 1987). In attempting to explain the similarities between the works in wood and terracotta, Christopher Roy has suggested that some Dogon may have settled for a time in the Inland Niger Delta region before moving finally to the cliffs (Munich, Fred und Jens Jahn Galerie, 1983: 7), while Bernard de Grunne has attributed some of the works, both in wood and terracotta, to another ethnic group entirely, the Kagoro, a Soninké or Malinké people who moved to the Inland Niger Delta area from the Mande region in the thirteenth century and who now live interspersed with the Dogon on the plateau above the cliffs (Paris, Fondation Dapper, 1987: 11; Grunne, 1987).

The investigation of the links between Dogon art and that of the Inland Niger Delta is just beginning. Formal and iconographic connections between the two groups of sculptures suggest important areas for future research, which can be said as well about other aspects of Dogon art. Despite more than fifty years of scholarship, many important questions remain unresolved in the area of the function and meaning of the art as well as its style and historical development. It is hoped that this exhibition of the Lester Wunderman collection of Dogon art, the most important collection of its kind, will demonstrate the achievements of Dogon artists and will raise some of the issues necessary for a fuller understanding of Dogon art.

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1. *Le pays dogon est encombré trop féeriquement de sanctuaires, objets rituels, lieux sacrés de toutes sortes, le cerveau des hommes qui l'habitent traversé par un réseau trop serré de mythes et de croyances, leur vie liée trop continuement à un tissu de rites pour qu'une telle notice soit un panoramique, encore bien moins une énumeration à tendance exhaustive.*

2. In addition to Marcel Griaule, the French research team that studied Dogon culture over the course of five decades included Germaine Dieterlen, Denise Paulme, Solange de Ganay, Michel Leiris, André Schaeffner, Deborah Lifszyc, Geneviève Calame-Griaule, and Dominique Zahan.

3. Independently of the Griaule "school," research has recently been undertaken among the Dogon by Wauter van Beek (Pern, 1982), Paul Lane (1986), Rogier Bedaux (1986), Jean-Christophe Huet, Bernard de Grunne, Sarah Brett-Smith, Hélène Leloup, and Allen Roberts.

4. The transformation of Marcel Griaule's approach from a documentary to an exegetical one is examined by James Clifford (1983).

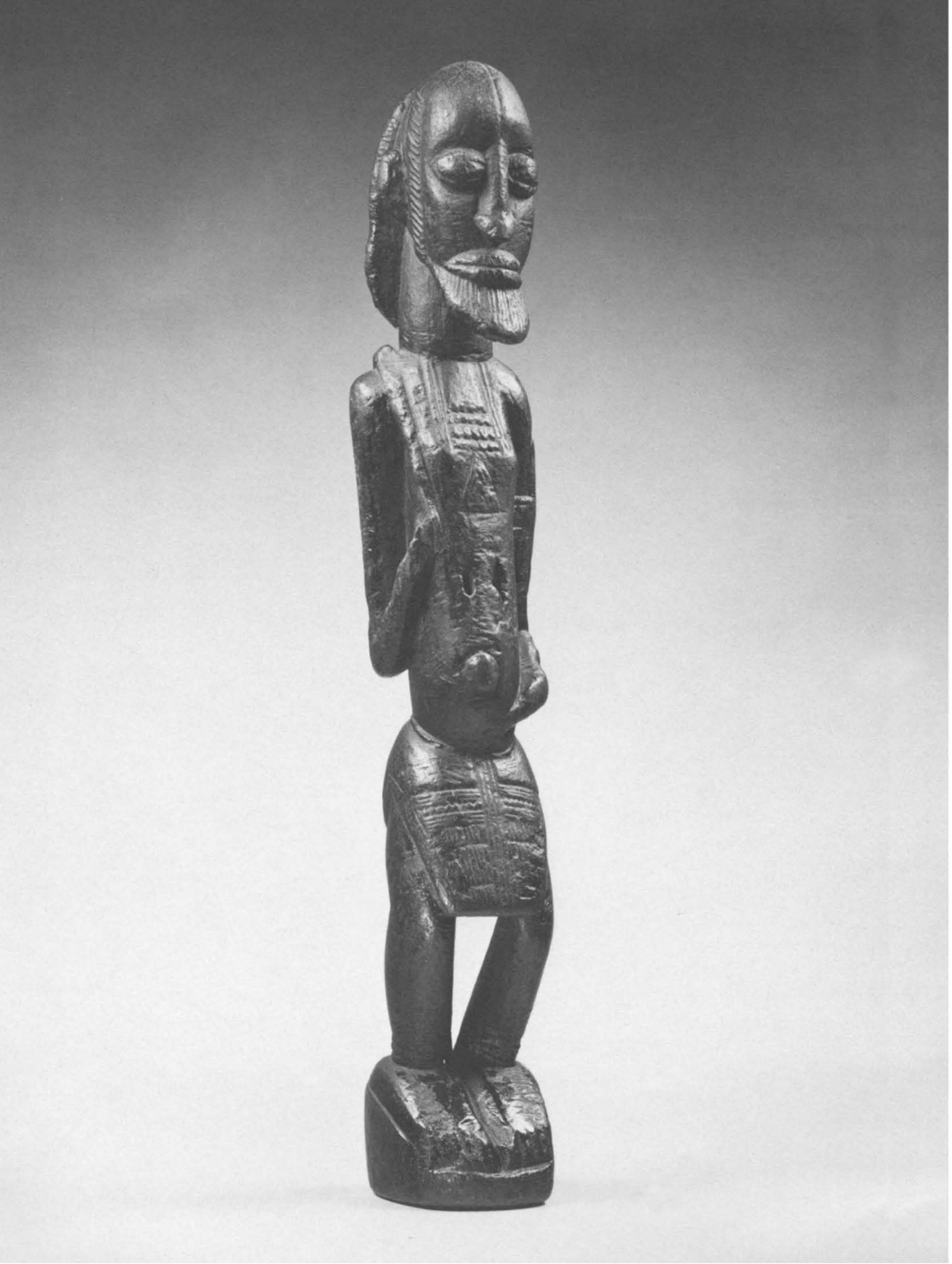
5. Criticisms of the Griaule "school" are summarized by Clifford (1983: 124) and include works by Balandier (1960), Copans (1973), Douglas (1967), Goody (1967), Hountondji (1983), Lettens (1971), Michel-Jones (1978), Richards (1967), Sarevskaja (1963), and Tait (1950).

6. Thorough discussions of the problems posed by Griaule school interpretations of Dogon art can be found in Flam (1970), DeMott (1982), and Roy (in Munich, Fred und Jens Jahn Galerie, 1983).

7. Wherever possible, the spelling of Dogon words in this catalogue follows that used by Calame-Griaule (1968). These words are in the *toro* dialect spoken in the Sanga region, which is only one of about a dozen dialects of the Dogon language.

8. Griaule and Dieterlen provide several versions of the Dogon myth of creation, each slightly different. These include Dieterlen (1941, 1956, 1965), Griaule (1938, 1947a, 1947c, 1948, 1949, 1965), and Griaule and Dieterlen (1986).

CATALOGUE



1. STANDING MALE FIGURE
Wood
H. 25⅜ in. (64.5 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1985
1985.422.2

This sculpture depicts a man clad in traditional Dogon dress carrying a characteristic implement. The man, whose projecting beard indicates his status as an elder, wears short trousers and a soft, woven cotton cap, which is pushed back behind his ears and draped over the nape of his neck. The L-shaped wooden staff he carries over his right shoulder, called a *domolo*, is used by Dogon men as a weapon and a tool and as a ritual object on many types of altars. A sheathed knife is strapped to his upper left arm, a pendant is depicted in relief on his chest, and several incised bands encircle his wrists and ankles. Only his knife, the decorative pattern of circles, stripes, and zigzags on his shorts, and the intricate design of his pendant suggest that anyone other than a typical Dogon farmer is being represented.

The bulging, rimmed eyes, straight nose, and broad mouth of the figure's somber face resemble the features in a group of Dogon sculptures that also share the rounded body, thick neck, long, oval head, and slightly asymmetrical pose.[1] This group of Dogon figures has important implications for the history of Dogon art. In style and iconography the figures closely resemble some of the terracotta sculptures made in the Inland Niger Delta region of Mali from the twelfth to the seventeenth century, and it has been suggested that they may date from the same period (Munich, Fred und Jens Jahn Galerie, 1983: 7). Radiocarbon dating of this figure and of two others in the group lends support to this hypothesis (Grunne, 1987). Although only a few of the sculptures have been dated by the radiocarbon method, these initial results raise important questions. Were the wood sculptures made by the Dogon or by other artists working in the region? If other artists carved them, what was their ethnic identity? A recent suggestion that this group of sculptures was made by artists of the Kagoro, people who migrated to the Inland Niger Delta and Dogon regions in the thirteenth century, requires further investigation (Grunne, 1987). The resolution of these questions is essential to understanding the history of art in this part of Africa, and sculptures like this one are important elements in that endeavor.

1. In addition to two standing male figures carrying *domolo* staffs over their shoulders (Leuzinger, 1972: A8; Paris, Grand Palais, 1984: 258), this group of figures also includes two equestrian figures (New York, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1983: no. 111; Rome, Villa Medici, 1986: 71), a kneeling female figure (New York, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1982: no. 262), and several standing figures (Meauzé, 1967: 153; Leiris and Delange, 1968: 152; Dallas, Museum of Fine Arts, 1975: no. 1; and New York, The Robert Goldwater Library Photograph Study Collection: AF2A Dogon A218).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 42.

Published: Attenborough, 1976: 14–15; Ezra, 1986: 71.

2. FIGURE WITH RAISED ARM
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 40⅝ in. (103.1 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

The most striking feature of this remarkable sculpture is the extreme contrast between the naturalism of the head and the severe abstraction of the body and raised arm. The long oval head has prominent cheeks, bulging, oval eyes rimmed with concentric grooves, and a broad mouth with lips formed by parallel projecting blocks that are almost triangular in shape. The head's smoothly rounded dome is topped by a tall, cylindrical coiffure, and below the broad chin is a wide, jutting beard distinguished by vertical striations. Like the male figure carrying a *domolo* staff over his shoulder (no. 1), this figure has a face similar to some of the terracotta sculptures made in the Inland Niger Delta region from the twelfth to the seventeenth century (e.g., Grunne, 1980: 61).

In sharp contrast to the face, the body of this figure has been reduced to geometric shapes that defy the rules of human anatomy. The head projects in relief from a flat plank with symmetrically curved outlines from which the right arm rises; the left arm has been broken off and lost. A cylindrical "torso" also projects from the flat background and is connected to the front edge of the beard by a short "neck." Below the cylinder extends an inverted conical base. A few other Dogon figures are similarly conceived.[1]

Some of these geometric features indicate that the figure may be related to Dogon sculptures used in family ancestor altars (*vageũ*) and in sanctuaries dedicated to the *binu*, "immortal" ancestors who enter into a protective, beneficial relationship with a clan or individual. Sculptures described as simple cylinders lacking the form of a human body have been found in both contexts, leaning against walls of shrines. This figure, whose tapering base cannot support it standing upright, could well have been placed against a wall. Both types of ancestor figures traditionally receive coatings of sacrificial animal blood, millet porridge, and other materials, which can be seen on this figure.

The combination in this sculpture of the fully realized, naturalistic head with a minimalized body demonstrates that these two ways of conceiving the human form do not represent different periods of Dogon art, regional styles, or contexts of use. Rather, they were used at the same time, even in the same sculpture. The simplification of forms often seen in Dogon art is clearly not a result of the artist's lack of technical skill or artistic vision but represents an aesthetic choice determined by many factors—such as the intended purpose and meaning of the sculpture—a subject that needs to be investigated further.

1. These are illustrated in Frankfurt am Main, Museum für Völkerkunde, 1967: no. 3; Lyons, Arts Premiers, 1982: no. 20; New York, The Robert Goldwater Library Photograph Study Collection: AF2A Dogon A8, A23.

3. FIGURAL GROUP
Wood
H. 16¾ in. (42.6 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1985
1985.422.1

With its dual, reflected faces and minimalized body, this example is one of the most enigmatic of Dogon sculptures. The only part of the object carved fully in the round is the powerful oval head at the top.[1] The body is reduced to an almost flat surface with an irregular, hourglass-shaped outline, on which the rest of the sculpture is carved in relief. The arms are raised from the shoulders but are so damaged that it is impossible to determine whether or not they extended above the large ears. An upside-down mirror image of the head is carved in relief on the torso, connected to it by an angled bridge decorated with grooves and zigzags. On the lower torso three figures are carved in relief; the figures at the sides are standing and the one in the center appears to be kneeling. The faces of all three resemble the larger faces above them.

There are few parallels in Dogon art to this fascinating object. A monumental hermaphroditic figure (New York, Center for African Art, 1987: 43), with a fully realized head, raised arms, and pendulous breasts, has a flattened torso from which two figures, one kneeling and one seated, project in relief, as on this figure. A fragment of another sculpture with arms raised bears the suggestion of an inverted face in relief on its planklike "torso" (Frankfurt am Main, Museum für Völkerkunde, 1967: no. 3). The five almost identical faces on this object have the same features that characterize the group of Dogon figures related to the standing male figure with the *domolo* over his shoulder (no. 1): a smoothly rounded head and projecting topknot, blocklike projecting mouth, straight nose, and jutting beard. Like those sculptures, this one bears a strong resemblance to the terracotta works made in the Inland Niger Delta from the twelfth to the seventeenth century, leaving unanswered many questions concerning its date, origin, and meaning.

1. A cylindrical topknot probably once projected from the top of the head, but the wood there has worn away, leaving only a hole.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 15.

Published: Besançon, Palais Granvelle, 1958: pl. V.

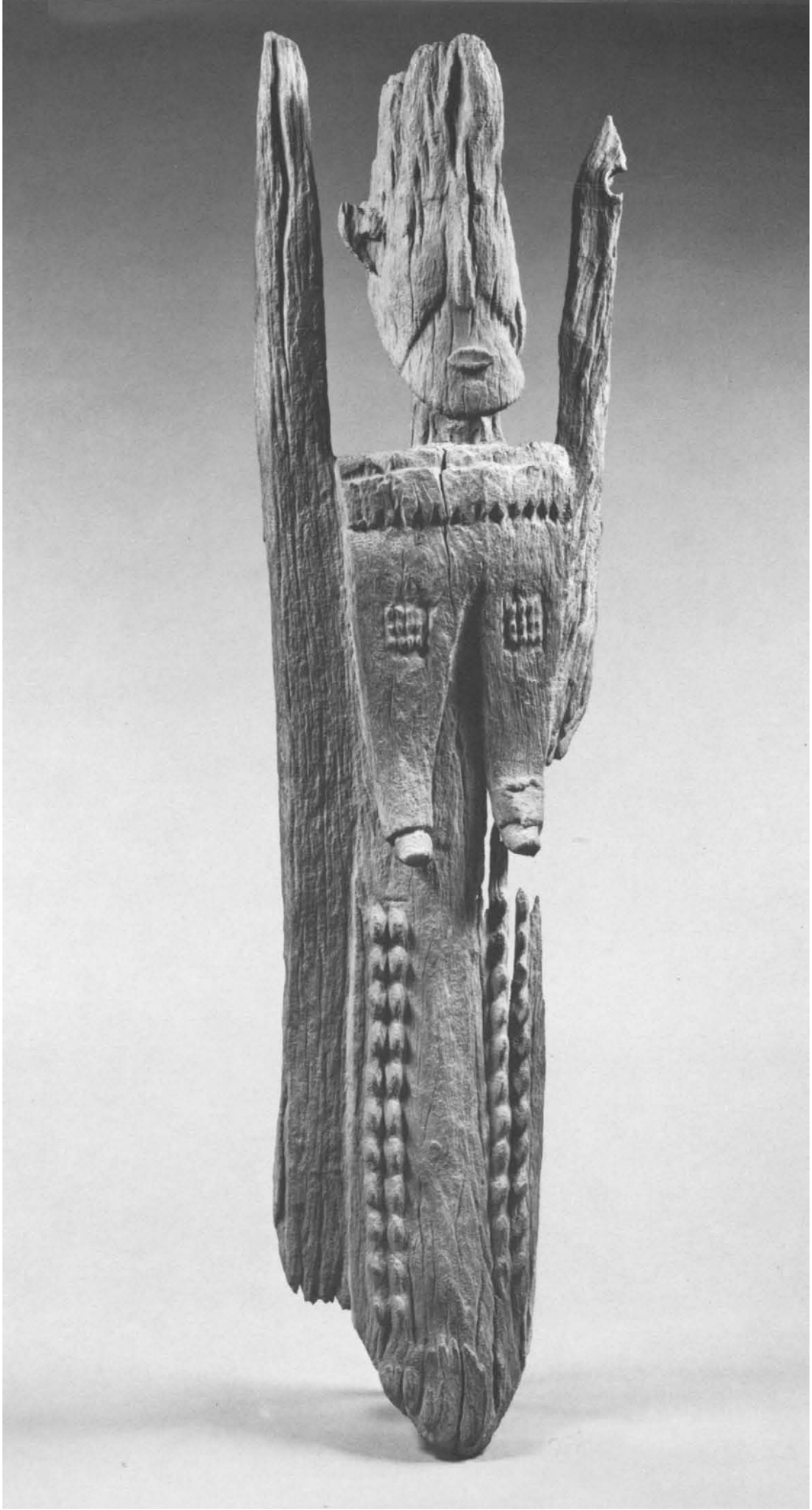
4. FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS (FRAGMENT)
Wood, pigment
H. 43½ in. (110.5 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.9

When complete, this fragmentary figure with raised arms may have been nearly life-size, virtually an inch-for-inch substitute for a deceased family member, as the earliest Dogon ancestor figures are said to have been (Dieterlen, 1941: 140). Dogon figure sculptures are unusual in African art for their monumental proportions, which sometimes exceed seven feet. In an environment where trees are scarce, the creation of wood sculptures on such a large scale clearly indicates their importance.

In this sculpture the head is carved in the round and the body is flat, although the chest stands out in relief and the tips of the breasts point upward, away from the body. Raised scarification marks run in parallel lines down the sides of the torso and form squares on each breast. No scarification marks are visible on the face. The facial features, except for a pronounced crease on each cheek, are extremely eroded; the tiny, round eyes are barely discernible. Figures with raised arms and completely or partially flattened and schematized bodies are common in Dogon art. Unable to stand by themselves, the figures may have leaned against the wall of shrines in the manner of figures on *vageñ* and *binu* ancestor altars described in no. 2 (Dieterlen, 1941: pls. Vb and Vc; Ganay, 1942: 13–14).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 19.

Published: Meauzé, 1967: 154.



5. FIGURE KNEELING ON AN ANIMAL
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 16½ in. (41.9 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Few Dogon sculptures are more ambiguous than this one. The figure seems to be a woman with heavy pendulous breasts, yet she is shown riding an animal, an unusual pose in African representations of women. The identity of the animal is also open to question, since its short, stumpy legs (which were broken off long ago), thick tail, and small head do not suggest a horse any more than they do another quadruped. Oddly, the figure kneels on the animal's back, a position that would be precarious at best. A group of similar figures is equally puzzling.[1]

This figure has the rough forms, blurred contours, and thick sacrificial crust that characterize sculptures attributed to the Tellem people, who populated the Bandiagara cliffs from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, when the Dogon arrived and caused them to flee. After World War Two a great many sculptures were collected from caves identified as Tellem sites, without proper documentation (Langlois, 1954; London, Hanover Gallery, 1959). When excavations of the Tellem sites were undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s, few sculptures remained in situ, making it difficult to verify the dates or even the existence of a distinctly Tellem style of sculpture. Most scholars now agree that it is impossible to differentiate between Tellem and Dogon sculpture, or to estimate the age of a sculpture on the basis of its style or the presence of sacrificial materials.

Figures on animals like this one have been used by the Dogon in the twentieth century, although it is not known when they were carved. One such figure on an animal is known to have belonged to a *hogon*, the spiritual and political leader in a Dogon village or region, and to have served a protective function (Desplagnes, 1907: 321*bis*). Denise Paulme and Deborah Lifszyc, students of Marcel Griaule, collected another similar figure with raised arms, which they found abandoned in a granary after the death of the woman who owned it; she had apparently used it on an ancestral altar (Leiris, 1936: 194; New York, Center for African Art, 1985: no. 12).

1. Figures related to this are illustrated in New York, Museum of Primitive Art, 1958: no. 1; Jerusalem, Israel Museum, 1967: no. 79; Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute, 1969: no. 15; Binghamton, University Art Gallery, 1972: no. 5; New York, Center for African Art, 1985: no. 12.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 43.

Published: Meauzé, 1967: 154.

6. HORSE AND RIDER
Wood
H. 32½ in. (82.6 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Dogon figures depicting horses and riders reflect the prestige and power surrounding an animal that has been associated with royalty since horses were introduced to West Africa more than a thousand years ago. Seated on a saddle with a high pommel, this rider raises his right hand; originally, he clasped the reins with his left hand, which is now lost.[1] Both rider and horse are bedecked with meticulously rendered ornaments. The rider wears a necklace of rectangular pendants strung on a plaited cord whose end hangs down to the middle of his back, and a sheathed knife is strapped to the upper part of his left arm. A rectangular grid of incised scarification marks is placed on each temple and more extensive patterns cover his back and torso; a line of zigzags has been carved in relief across the chest and upper back. The horse also wears a row of pendants on a plaited cord strung across its chest; its bridle is ornamented with zigzags. The man's facial features, plaited coiffure, jutting beard, and rounded body are related to other Dogon figures (see no. 7).[2]

Dogon equestrian figures are most often identified as images of the *hogon*, since in Dogon society horses are a luxury generally reserved for rich and powerful people (Griaule, 1938: 10). Because horses occur in Dogon beliefs about the creation of the world, the *hogon* as rider is seen as a symbol of a mythical personage. Thus, the equestrian *hogon* has been interpreted both as the blacksmith, a mythical character who himself stands for Nommo, a being that represents order in the universe (Laude, 1978: 102), and as Lebe, a primordial ancestor, whose cult, over which the *hogon* presides, is concerned with fertility and regeneration of the earth (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1983: 7). The *hogon* as rider has also been seen as a representation of Dyon, another primordial ancestor who is said to have migrated on horseback to the Dogon area from Mande (Grunne, 1987).

Throughout their oeuvre, Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen emphasized the connections between Dogon art and cosmology, laying the basis for such far-reaching interpretations as these. However, none of the Dogon figures of horsemen similar to this has been documented in the field, and there is no compelling evidence to suggest that they refer either to specific personages in village life or to characters in myth. While field research is necessary to identify the actual contexts in which these figures were used by the Dogon, it should also be kept in mind that the theme of the horse and rider is found throughout the art of the Western Sudan. Even the gestures and attributes of the Dogon equestrian figures can be seen in the terracotta figures of the Inland Niger Delta and in the wood sculpture of the neighboring Senufo and Bamana. These parallels attest to the wide appeal of this image and its adaptability to many different milieus. To understand Dogon equestrian figures it may be more useful to look at the history of horsemen in the Western Sudan—as warriors, invaders, and emissaries of distant kingdoms. These factors, rather than the instances when horses occur in Dogon myths, may be responsible for the presence of equestrian imagery in Dogon art.

1. This figure's left arm below the elbow and part of the rein, visible in earlier photographs, were found to be a modern restoration and have recently been removed.

2. Similar figures of horsemen are illustrated in New York, Museum of Primitive Art, 1959: pl. 13; Himmelheber, 1960: 76; Laude, 1965: fig. 3; Robbins, 1966: 53; Brussels, Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ixelles, 1967: no. 15; Laude, 1978: 97; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1983: fig. 3; Paris, Grand Palais, 1984: 261.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 47.

Published: Meauzé, 1967: 32–33; Zurich, Kunsthaus, 1970: no. A3; Essen, Villa Hügel, 1971: no. A3; Leuzinger, 1972: no. A3; Winizki, 1972; Short, 1975: 15; Leuzinger, 1978: no. 3.

7. WOMAN WITH MORTAR AND PESTLE
Wood, iron
H. 22¼ in. (56.5 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1979
1979.541.12

This figure represents a woman with a mortar and pestle, which are used to pound millet and other cereal grains that are staples of the Dogon diet (see fig. 7); these grains also figure prominently in Dogon beliefs about the origin of the universe and the creation of mankind (Dieterlen and Calame-Griaule, 1960; Griaule, 1965). The figure has a powerful, fully rounded torso and muscular, flexed legs; the long arms firmly grasp the pestle, as if they were bringing it down hard to crush the grain in the mortar. The artist has painstakingly reproduced the pattern of the woman's plaited hair and shows her wearing two necklaces of cylindrical beads strung on a twisted cord. Her facial features, particularly the almond-shaped eyes placed close together, the wide nostrils, projecting pursed mouth, and strong chin, are characteristic of many Dogon sculptures (see no. 6).

Dogon figures of women with mortars and pestles pose problems of interpretation, since none has been documented as to its context and meaning (Meauzé, 1967: 150, 155; New York, Pace Primitive, 1976: 320). Jean Laude has suggested that a Dogon artist does not depict an event that is "ephemeral and occurs one time only. Rather, he aims at *conveying* what is behind a fleeting gesture or attitude that is permanent and forms the basis of the myth—that which keeps the gesture or attitude forever alive" (1978: 98). Accordingly, Laude interprets sculptures such as this one not merely as a woman caught in the everyday act of pounding grain but rather as the image of the *hogon*, "whose life, according to the myth, is identified with the growing of millet" (Laude, 1964: 65; Laude, 1971: 210; Brooklyn Museum, 1973: 56). Since one of the basic tenets of Dogon thought is the simultaneous existence of several meanings corresponding to various levels of knowledge (Griaule, 1952; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 71), such an interpretation of this figure is not inconceivable, but it does beg for confirmation based on field research.

Another interpretation, one that does not require such a great transformation of meaning from the visual image to the idea represented, can also be suggested. The sculpture may serve as a means of acknowledging the work performed by a woman during her lifetime. The work that men and women do throughout their lives is recalled at the time of their funerals in long orations that enumerate their labor in the fields and in the home (Paulme, 1940: 502–4; Dieterlen, 1941: 100–108, 112, n. 4). For a woman the following words are spoken:

> Thank you for yesterday, thank you for yesterday. Thank you for working in the fields, thank you for having children (with the help of) God. Thank you for the food that she prepared, thank you for the meat, thank you for the millet beer, thank you for the water, thank you (Paulme, 1940: 526).

In such a funeral oration a woman is often likened to a wooden stirring tool that has become short because it has been used so much, a reference to the endless work she has performed for the benefit of her family (Ganay, 1941: 45–46). This particular sculpture, which depicts a woman engaged in characteristic labor, may be the visual equivalent of such an oration. Placed on a family ancestral altar, this sculpture would have been an enduring statement of recognition for the work the deceased performed during her lifetime, a means of preserving indefinitely the words of gratitude spoken at her funeral.

Exhibited: La Jolla, Art Center, 1960: no. 15; New York, African-American Institute, 1976: no. 39.

8. KNEELING WOMAN WITH CHILD
Wood
H. 19⅜ in. (49.2 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Images of women with children abound in Dogon art, not surprising for a society in which children are a woman's dominant concern (Paulme, 1940: 417). In this sculpture, the child sits across the woman's thighs, its back cradled in her left arm and its side pressed against her torso. Although the woman's expression is solemn and restrained, the sculpture suggests the tender, protective relationship between a mother and child; in other examples the woman is even shown feeding the child from her hand, a more obvious statement of her nurturing role (Meauzé, 1967: 37). The asymmetrical compositions and naturalistic gestures seen in Dogon figures of women and children contrast with the stiff, formal poses seen in sculptures of the same theme by artists of the nearby Bamana people (Washington, D.C., National Museum of African Art, 1986: nos. 25, 33).

The style of this sculpture is related to that of the equestrian figure (no. 6) and the woman with mortar and pestle (no. 7). These works belong to a group of Dogon sculptures that have similar features, including rimmed, almond-shaped eyes, a pronounced, arrow-shaped nose, projecting mouth, and wide, prominent chin and jaw. These figures also have the rounded and relatively naturalistic bodies and limbs seen here, and they are not nearly as abstract and geometricized as those carved in other Dogon styles. The figures are also characterized by the use of descriptive details such as the wide necklace with many pendants, the incised grid of scarification marks on each breast, and the carefully delineated hairstyle seen in this sculpture. Without field documentation, sculptures in this style and its many variants cannot be attributed to a particular region or period of Dogon art.

9. STANDING WOMAN WITH CHILD
Wood
H. 31½ in. (80.0 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

In creating this sculpture, the artist has transformed a cylindrical block of wood into a series of stacked diagonal forms whose jagged ends create a dynamic, rhythmic composition. These diagonal forms can be seen in the drooping breasts, the full abdomen exaggerated to a point at the navel, the position of the baby cradled in the woman's arms, and, finally, the supporting slope of the thighs, which extend from the sharply jutting buttocks to the flexed knees. Even the slanted lines of the coiffure and the jut of the strong chin reflect this method of reconstructing the human body out of similarly shaped and angled forms, a characteristic of much Dogon art.

The figure is shown wearing an apron or loincloth whose fine vertical grooves represent stripes or fringes. The woman's hair is carefully plaited and arranged in four sections at the top, sides, and back of the head, with spaces in between that appear to be shaved. This hairstyle, which appears on many Dogon sculptures, must have been considered quite elegant, since allusions to it are made in honorific phrases (*tige*) that refer to spirits in the form of wealthy, elegant women who are instrumental in establishing links between *binu* ancestors and their descendants (Ganay, 1941: 113, 124–25).

As in most Dogon images of women with children, this woman holds the baby cradled in the crook of her arm, its frontally viewed body curved to conform to the bulge of her abdomen. The baby is a graceful, fluid form that seems to float like a fish alongside its mother's body. Although the carver may not have intended the analogy, the baby's form suggests the connection that, according to Griaule, is made in Dogon thought between a species of fish, the *Clarias senegalensis*, and the human fetus, which swims in amniotic waters (Griaule, 1955).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 55.

10. KNEELING WOMAN
Wood
H. 14¾ in. (37.5 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

More delicate than most Dogon sculptures, this slim-waisted figure suggests the reason for a phrase often sung at funerals for Dogon women: "Thank you for yesterday, she was [pretty] as a statue" (Dieterlen, 1941: 120). The figure's long neck and small head and the thin, elongated torso and arms enhance her fragile appearance. Bands of incised scarification marks cross her abdomen, and similar incised marks, which create rows of small squares, can be seen on her breasts and cheeks. Cross-hatched plaits of hair are arranged in three sections at the top and sides of the head, leaving the back free. A necklace of six rectangular pendants strung on a cord with a knot at the back is carved on her chest. Her large, strong jaw, projecting mouth, and small oval eyes are hallmarks of a Dogon sculptural style that is more naturalistic than most and emphasizes descriptive details (see also nos. 8 and 9).

The kneeling posture assumed by this figure is a common theme in Dogon art, especially in sculptures of women. Dogon women assume this kneeling pose at funerals, as a sign of their grief and of gratitude to the deceased for a productive life (Lifszyc, 1938: 53; Griaule, 1938: 291, 372; Dieterlen, 1941: 108, 113; Ganay, 1941: pl. VIc). Given that many Dogon figures are placed on ancestral altars dedicated to deceased family members (*vageū*), it is possible that the figures of kneeling women are intended to preserve this gesture and the sentiment it embodies.

11. KNEELING WOMAN
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 14½ in. (36.8 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

This kneeling figure supports on her head a small seven-legged stool of the type commonly used in the Dogon household (Pern, 1982: 31). Although the carver has emphasized the natural fleshiness of the woman's torso and her heavy breasts, he has taken many other liberties with her anatomy in this small but complex sculpture. Her chest has been transformed into a curved band that wraps around her shoulders and upper arms, and her long legs have been whittled down to thin bands, so that the narrow, pointed buttocks are supported by exaggerated feet. The artist has also taken bold steps with the figure's face, balancing the large T-shaped nose above the strong horizontal form of the jaw and the vertical line of the lip ornament, or labret. Horizontal grooves incised in the labret, the back of the hair, the shoulders, chest, elbows, and soles of the feet unify this sculpture's disparate forms.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 32.

12. KNEELING WOMAN WITH CHILDREN
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 12⅞ in. (32.7 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.21

With one child stretched across her torso and two on her back, this figure demonstrates the value the Dogon place on having many children. The infant clings to the mother's abdomen at an angle, as on other Dogon images of women with children (see no. 9), but here it is neither cradled by the mother's arms nor supported by her sloping thighs. The two children on her back stand on her buttocks, grasping her shoulders with their outstretched arms. They are surely meant to be twins, since their bodies are not merely identical in form but seem fused to imply a single identity.

The features of this sculpture are all but obscured by the thick crust of sacrificial materials that cover it. Sacrificial liquids are poured on figure sculptures and other ritual objects found on personal altars, ancestral altars, in *binu* sanctuaries, on altars dedicated to Nommo, and on *yaũpilũ* altars, which are dedicated to the souls of women who died in pregnancy or childbirth. Many different substances are used for sacrifice, including the blood of chickens, sheep, and goats slaughtered for this purpose; millet porridge; mixtures of various fruit and plant juices and pulp with millet flour or flour made from the fruit and seeds of the baobab and *yullo* (*Parkia biglobosa*) trees; and concoctions of burned herbs, charcoal, and shea oil or the oil of the *sa* tree (*Lannea acida*).

These sacrificial materials are vehicles for *nyama*, the vital force that determines a person's mental and physical well-being and allows a person to continue living. *Nyama* is found in all living things, including animals and plants, and in supernatural beings as well. *Nyama* can be liberated from its support and transmitted to another being, for example when an animal is killed or a plant crushed. When a sacrifice is made, the *nyama* of the sacrificial material strengthens and increases not only the *nyama* of the spiritual being to whom the sacrifice is offered but also that of the persons who perform the sacrifice. In the Dogon language the word for sacrifice, *bulu*, is derived from the verb *bulo*, meaning "to revivify or resuscitate," which underscores the positive, life-affirming benefits of the ritual. Although sacrificial materials may obscure the appearance of the sculpture, the ritual of sacrifice puts both the agent and object of the sacrifice in a state of purity, order, freshness, and vitality (Griaule, 1940b; Dieterlen, 1947; Calame-Griaule, 1968: 49).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 56.

13. WOMAN WITH TWINS
Wood
H. 15½ in. (39.4 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.13

In this figure, the human body has been altered in ways that are characteristic of one style of Dogon art. Most notable are the sharply angled legs and the elongated arms, which are bent at the elbows and at the wrists to create a steplike form. The breasts are placed high on the long, narrow torso and continue the mass of the shoulders and upper back. This stylization of the human body can be seen in many Dogon sculptures, such as the standing female figure by the "Master of Ogol" (no. 14), and the seated couple (no. 23), although the details may vary, suggesting individual or workshop styles. The figure's face in this example, with its arrow-shaped nose and lozenge-shaped mouth, is inscribed within the boundaries formed by the raised jaw and hairline, a feature seen on some other Dogon sculptures.[1]

Two tiny figures project from the figure's back, framed by the wide horizontal forms of the shoulder blades and buttocks and by the vertical bands created by the arms. Their faces and bodies are identical to the large figure, which carries them on her back as a mother would. It is possible that these two figures represent twins, since twins are accorded a special status in Dogon society. In Dogon beliefs about creation, the original beings were twins, and subsequent single births marked a disruption of order in the universe. Twins are endowed with the vital force (*nyama*) of two types of spirits called Yeban and Nommo and are thought to bring prosperity and fertility to the families into which they are born (Paulme, 1940: 452–58; Dieterlen, 1941: 136, 157–65).

1. Similar figures are illustrated in Elisofon and Fagg, 1958: 33; Dallas, Museum of Fine Arts, 1975: no. 36; Seattle, Henry Art Gallery, 1982: no. 49; and New York, The Robert Goldwater Library Photograph Study Collection, AF2A Dogon A58, A59.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 30.

14. STANDING FEMALE FIGURE
Wood
H. 25 in. (63.5 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.20

Along with about a dozen almost identical figures, this figure has been attributed to a Dogon artist known to Western scholars and collectors as the "Master of Ogol," named after the village in which an example of his work was collected in 1935 for the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.[1] This group of figures reflects stylistic traits seen frequently in Dogon art (see no. 13), but it is set apart by the way in which the horizontal and vertical geometric forms are tightly interlocked and balanced. This artist's "signature" can be read in the neatly stacked horizontal bands created by the chin, lips, and nostrils and in the way these forms are framed at the top and bottom by the strong verticals of the nose and the cylindrical lip ornament. Little is known about the identity of the carver or workshop responsible for this group of figures. Although some of the works were collected in Ogol, a village in the Sanga region where members of the Griaule missions did much of their research, it has been suggested that at least one of the carvers lived near Wazouba, a village northwest of Ogol on the plateau above the Bandiagara cliffs (Dieterlen, 1981: 18).

According to information collected with a similar object in the Musée de l'Homme, figures of this type are called *dege dal nda*, "sculptures of the terrace," and are stored in the house of the *hogon*.[2] They are taken out of storage for the funerals of rich men and dressed and displayed on the rooftop terrace of the deceased (Paris, Musée de l'Homme, 1966: no. 14).[3] Used for display purposes, these figures would thus seem to be different in function from those normally placed on a family's ancestral altar (*vageũ*) to serve as supports for the deceased person's soul. This difference in function may explain their relatively clean surfaces. Instead of sacrificial coatings of dried blood and millet porridge, the figures in this group tend to be covered with a thin, varnishlike layer said to consist of tree sap, soot, and oil (Leuzinger, 1963: no. 13). Many Dogon figures in other styles have similar surfaces free of sacrificial materials, which may indicate that they too were used for display purposes, either during funerals or inside a shrine.

1. Other figures that seem to be by the same hand, or from the same workshop, include two figures in the Musée de l'Homme (34.55.2, New York, The Robert Goldwater Library Photograph Study Collection, AF2A Dogon A78; and 35.60.371, Saint-Priest, Galerie Municipale d'Exposition, 1982: no. 28); the Rietberg Museum, Zurich (Leuzinger, 1972: no. A23); the Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas (Dallas, Museum of Fine Arts, 1975: no. 5); the Guerre collection (Marseilles, Musée Cantini, 1970: no. 23); the Tishman collection (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981: no. 1); the Loran collection (Berkeley, Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, 1967: no. 17); the Martin collection (London, Alexander Martin Gallery, 1971: no. 13); the Smiley collection (Oliver, 1979); the William Rubin collection; the Leloup collection; and an anonymous collection (New York, Center for African Art, 1987: 56).

2. Another figure in this group is said to have been used in a *yaũpilũ* shrine, dedicated to the souls of women who died during pregnancy and childbirth (Dieterlen, 1981: 17). The few published descriptions of Dogon altars complete with figure sculpture indicate that there is no correlation between the style of a sculpture and the particular context in which it is found, so that figures belonging to this closely related stylistic group may have been used in a variety of ways.

3. Among the Minyanka, an ethnic group south of the Dogon, a wooden figure dressed in headtie and wrapper is similarly displayed next to the corpse at a woman's funeral (Colleyn, 1987).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 52.

15. SQUATTING MALE FIGURE
Wood
H. 20½ in. (52.1 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.8

With its massive head, columnar body, and attenuated legs, this figure has few stylistic counterparts, yet many of its features conform to patterns seen frequently in Dogon art. The raised arms, for example, constitute one of the most common gestures in Dogon sculpture (see nos. 16–20), and the hourglasslike contour created by the broad, curved shoulders, the narrow torso, and the wide haunches is also seen in many works, especially the flat, almost planklike figures in nos. 2 and 3. Like many Dogon artists, the carver of this sculpture was a master at reducing the human body to its essential parts. Here he has added details such as the broad, jutting beard, tiny nipples and genitals, and pairs of bracelets and anklets, which define the person represented and enliven the sculpture's simplified shapes.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 18.

16. FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 17½ in. (44.5 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.10

A figure with raised arms is one of the most common types of Dogon sculpture. In this example, the artist has used the gesture to create an almost perfectly balanced composition, in which arms and legs, bent at the elbows and knees, extend on both sides of the sharply angled torso. The buttocks and shoulder blades, both U-shaped, reinforce this symmetry. The almost featureless face conforms to the simplification of forms that characterizes some Dogon sculpture.

A number of interrelated meanings have been given to Dogon sculptures with raised arms. In their later work, Griaule and Dieterlen interpreted the gesture of raised arms as representing various aspects of Nommo's role in organizing and purifying the universe and his relationship with Amma, the Creator (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 381–85). Earlier, the gesture had been said to indicate communication between the earth and heaven (Leiris, 1933: 30), specifically a prayer for rain, an essential commodity in the arid environment in which the Dogon people live. This latter interpretation is bolstered by the appearance of this gesture in actual Dogon ritual. Sacrifices to elicit rain are made on altars called *andugo*, which are dedicated to the spiritual being Nommo, who is present in all water, including rain. *Andugo* altars consist of ancient stone axes believed by the Dogon to have been sent down by Nommo with the rain, iron hooks called *gobo*, and sometimes wooden figures. After making a sacrifice over the altar and building a fire whose thick smoke is said to attract dark rain clouds, the officiant holds a *gobo* in his outstretched arm and brings it back over his head, making a hooking gesture to pull the rain-bearing clouds closer (Dieterlen and Ganay, 1942: 36, 38). It may only be coincidental, but this figure, whose arms are bent awkwardly at the elbow, appears to make precisely that gesture.

The figure is covered with a dense, fine-grained coating of sacrificial materials. This brownish-black surface is suggestive of the materials that are sometimes used for making sacrifices on *andugo* altars. These materials vary from village to village, but in some cases consist of powdered charcoal mixed with *sa* oil, a black oil made from the *Lannea acida* tree and used by the Dogon for cosmetic and ritual purposes. The prayer that accompanies the sacrifice asking Amma for rain is, "As we have blackened [the *andugo*], blacken the sky"; that is, send the rain clouds that turn the sky black (Ganay, 1941: 96; Dieterlen and Ganay,

1942: 37, 38). Like the gesture of raised arms, this figure's dense black surface may also represent an eloquent plea for life-giving rain.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 21.

Published: Short, 1975: 12.

17. FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 21 in. (53.3 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1979
1979.541.1

The gesture of raised arms can be found on relatively naturalistic Dogon figures (e.g., New York, Museum of Primitive Art, 1974: no. 51) as well as on those that have been transformed into arrangements of geometric shapes, like this example. Here the artist has created a double image—a figure with raised arms carved in relief on a highly abstract, planklike figure that also has raised arms. The figure in relief wears a tapering coiffure and has an odd-looking pointed chest. The plank figure tapers to a point at the bottom, presumably because it leaned against a wall or was placed flat on the ground, as in altars dedicated to the deceased family members and *binu*, "immortal" ancestors revered by an entire clan.

Flat plank figures like this are not uncommon in Dogon art. The flat portion may extend the full length of the figure, or may end above the hips. These figures are almost always coated with a thick crust of sacrificial materials and often have notches cut in each side. In some cases these notches suggest the indentation of the torso between the shoulders and the hips. Figures in the form of planks have been found in the Tellem caves (Langlois, 1954; Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977: 22), which indicates that the motif may be quite old. However, some of the most full-volumed, naturalistic Dogon sculptures, stylistically opposed to the plank figures, also seem to be among the oldest (Grunne, 1987), suggesting once again that style is not a useful factor in determining the age of a Dogon sculpture. The origin and meaning of the plank form, like that of the raised arms, is an important area for future research.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 13.

18. FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 18¼ in. (46.4 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

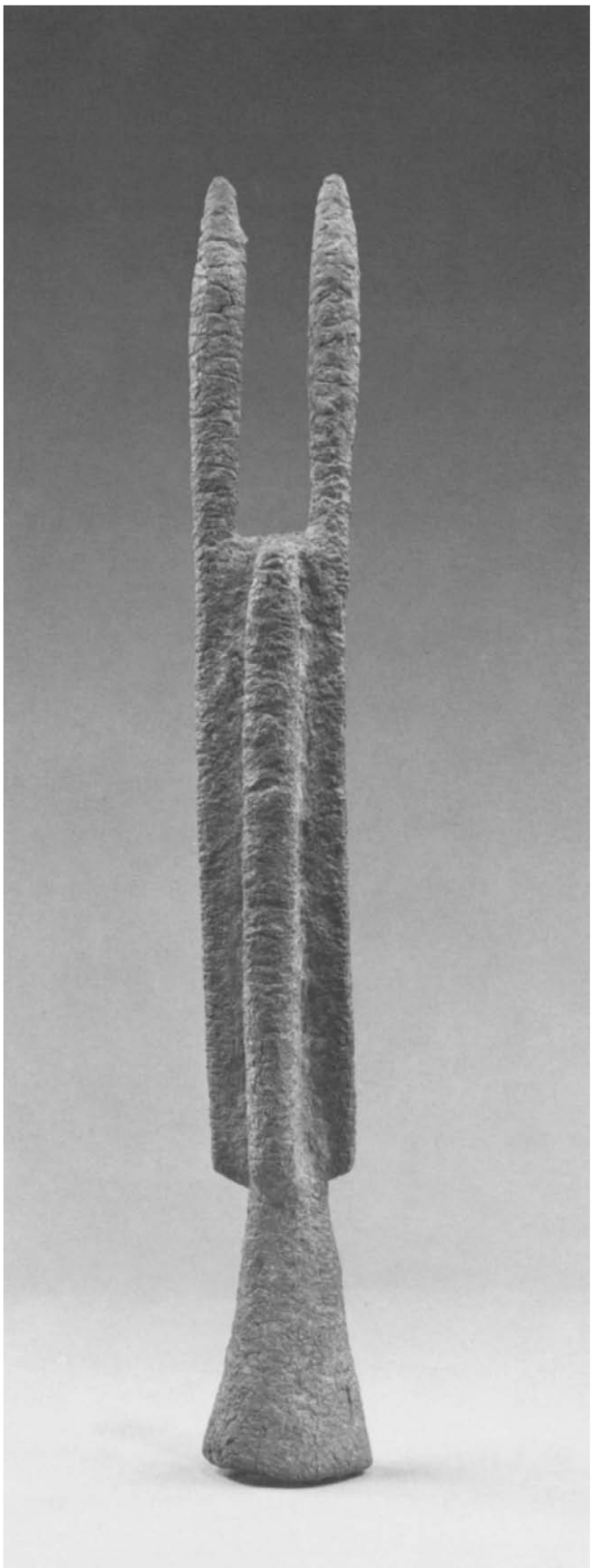
The tendency in Dogon art to reduce the human body to its geometric components and to transform it into a flat planklike form has been carried to an extreme in this figure. It consists of a thin, rectangular board, with an oval head carved in relief and two raised arms extending from the top. On the back, a smaller figure with raised arms projects in relief. Although carried on the back like a baby, this tiny figure resembles the relief figures seen on Dogon granary shutters, stools, containers, and staffs, where they seem to refer in a general way to people, ancestors, or spirits. Three slightly raised areas arranged in a row down the front of the larger figure are difficult to interpret, although the oval shape with a depression in the center is suggestive of female genitalia. The entire figure, front and back, is encased in a thick, hard crust of sacrificial materials.

The gesture of raised arms pervades Dogon art, just as its most common interpretation, a prayer for rain, pervades Dogon religion. Pleas for rain are made not only at the *andugo* altars (see no. 16), but also at altars dedicated to a family's ancestors, the *binu*, and Lebe. All of these altars are the focus of one of the most important Dogon rituals, called *bulu*, the same term that is also used in a general way for all sacrifices. *Bulu* takes place every year at the beginning of the planting season. At the climax of this ritual, the *hogon* and various *binu* priests climb to the roofs of their sanctuaries and throw down to the assembled crowd heads of millet from sacred fields, which are to be used in planting that year's crop (Lifszyc and Paulme, 1936: 104–5; Ganay, 1942: 28). A photograph of this ritual shows a priest flinging the grain with arms raised and outstretched (Ganay, 1942: pl. IIIb). The same gesture that invokes the heavens to send down rain may also capture the motion that results in the other essential component of a good harvest—seeds impregnated with the life force of the ancestors and *binu*.

Although accounts of sculptures in Dogon shrines dedicated to family and *binu* ancestors suggest that many types and styles of figures are found there, the few published drawings and photographs of these altars indicate that figures with severely reduced, abstract forms covered with sacrificial materials are frequently among them (Dieterlen, 1941: pls. Vb and Vc, fig. 10; Ganay, 1942: 14). A figure like this one may well have been placed in such a shrine, leaning against the wall, where the gesture of outstretched arms, either praying for rain or casting down grain, would reinforce the principal concern of Dogon religion—to assure a good harvest that will enable the community to survive another year.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 8.

Published: Kan, 1973: 76; New York, African-American Institute, 1976: 8–9.



19. FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 16¾ in. (42.6 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Except for the raised arms, almost all anatomical references have been stripped from this figure. Among the most abstract and geometric of Dogon sculptures, it has been reduced to a cylindrical torso projecting from a flat, rectangular back. The slender arms, thin torso, and tapering conical base create an illusion of soaring lightness and grace, which overpowers the heavy coating of sacrificial materials on its surface.

Since the early 1950s, figures similar to this one have frequently been attributed in the literature on African art to the Tellem (Langlois, 1954), people who lived along the Bandiagara Escarpment until the fifteenth century. It is thought that the dry, protected environment of the caves in the cliffs has enabled the so-called Tellem figures to survive since that time. According to a commonly held view, they are characterized by their thick sacrificial crusts and rough, simplified forms, while sculptures attributed to the Dogon themselves are said to have more complex forms and more detailed surfaces.

While the existence of the Tellem as predecessors of the Dogon has been confirmed by recent archaeological investigations (Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977), the nature of their art and its relationship to that of the Dogon remains unclear. Factors other than the separation between the Tellem and Dogon people may account for the various styles of sculpture from the Bandiagara cliffs, such as distinct groups of artists or different contexts of use. The difference is almost certainly not entirely a chronological one, since sculptures in the "Tellem style" are still current in the twentieth century and some sculptures in the full-volumed, descriptive style are now thought to date from the early years of the Dogon presence on the cliffs. For a sculpture such as this, for which no information exists as to its place of collection and context of use, it is impossible to estimate the sculpture's age or to determine whether it is Tellem or Dogon in origin.

20. DOUBLE-HEADED FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 20⅜ in. (51.8 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.11

The rounded, fleshy torso and legs of this figure contrast sharply with its severely abstracted back, which projects from the sides like a flat plank with serrated edges and extends to form the upraised arms. Above the figure is a

second head, connected to it by a "neck" bent at an angle. The figure, whose features are thick and bulbous, demonstrates the difficulty in distinguishing between the many stylistic types seen in Dogon sculpture. Very often, as here, divergent styles can be found in the same sculpture.

This figure also illustrates problems that arise with the interpretation of Dogon art. This figure has been said to

> depict the descent of the *Nommo* with raised arms into the skull of a figure who is probably the head of the line of *hogons*. . . . The cranium is split above the brow ridge to indicate the removal of the braincase and thus the suppression of the obstacles that would prevent communication between the spirit and the mind it momentarily possesses. . . . The raised arms, shared by both figures, signify that they are of the same essence or that the communication is complete (Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 24; also Laude, 1964: 65).

This type of interpretation, which links specific aspects of a sculpture with elements derived from the rich literature about Dogon cosmology, is typical of much writing about Dogon art. In this case it appears to be loosely based on information concerning the relationship between the *hogon*, the mythical being Lebe of whom he is the priest, and Nommo (see Griaule, 1965: 119, 135), but the interpretation is not supported by statements made by Dogon informants or by data concerning the context of the sculpture's use. Such interpretations have been justified by a belief, expressed by Jean Laude, that "the sculpture of the Dogon country does not symbolize thought but stimulates it" and that it does not "illustrate meanings outside of itself; rather it produces meanings" (Brooklyn Museum, 1973: 45). This belief has given Laude and others license to produce their own meanings, to apply to Dogon sculptures whatever bits of Dogon ideology or mythology they feel are applicable without reference to the meanings attributed to them by the Dogon themselves. As in this example, sculptures are identified as Nommo or as other beings from Dogon myth and ritual without any documentation.

Although of inestimable value to the field of African studies, the writings of Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen nevertheless paved the way for such interpretations. Their account of Dogon thought emphasized the existence of multiple meanings, based upon the interpreter's own level of knowledge (Griaule, 1952); they described how the Dogon system of initiation and education forces the individual to make his own connections between the elements of the vast and diverse body of data provided by Dogon ritual (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 67–69). However valid such connections may be for Dogon people who are versed in their own culture, the non-Dogon viewer of Dogon art should not match sculptural form with mythological episode so freely. Until further field research is undertaken, the meaning of this figure and many others must remain unknown.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 24.

Published: New York, Parke-Bernet Galleries, 1965: lot 30.

21. STANDING FIGURE COVERING ITS FACE
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 11⅞ in. (29. 5 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

In this slender figure the hands, jawline, upper arms, and thighs create parallel diagonal forms that alternate with the verticals created by the neck, forearms, back, and shins to form a tightly organized, geometric composition. The figure's chest is concealed by its upper arms and shoulders, which continue around the back, echoing the form of the buttocks. Its face is completely hidden behind its oversized hands, a gesture that occurs in Dogon art on free-standing figures and on figures carved in relief on granary shutters, wooden containers, staffs, and other objects.

Figures making this gesture are frequently referred to as images of "Dyougou Serou," said to be a character from Dogon myth who committed incest with his mother, the earth, and who therefore hides his face in shame. This often-repeated interpretation seems to have originated in Jean Laude's studies of Dogon sculpture (Laude, 1964: 64; Laude, 1971: 217; Brooklyn Museum, 1973: nos. 1–3). It has little basis in the copious literature about Dogon myth and ritual, except for Michel Leiris' brief mention of a similar figure in the Musée de l'Homme. Leiris suggested that the figure hides its face "'*parce qu'il a honte*,'" (because he is ashamed) but he did not specify why, nor did he identify the figure with any particular being or event in Dogon myth (Leiris, 1936: 194).[1]

Beginning in the mid-1950s, the mythical ancestor "Dyongou Serou" appears in some of the writings of Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, and this may be the source for Laude's misspelled identification of the image. Dyongou Serou, a hunter and healer, is one of the original eight ancestors of mankind, along with Amma Serou, Lebe Serou, Binou Serou, and their four female twins whom they exchanged as wives. Of the four males, Dyongou Serou is associated with Ogo (sometimes called the jackal, and later the Pale Fox), a member of the previous generation of mythical beings who disturbed the order of the newly created universe by violating his placenta, the earth, thereby committing incest with his mother (Griaule, 1965: 21–22; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 209). Dyongou Serou followed Ogo's disruptive example by cultivating the forbidden grain, fonio (*Digitaria exilis*), and stealing land from sacred fields. As a result of this transgression of the established order, Dyongou Serou died and caused death to spread among mankind (Dieterlen, 1956: 110, 114, 118–19; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 41, 51, 404 n. 327, 451).[2]

Nowhere in these accounts is the specific gesture of covering the face mentioned in connection with Dyongou Serou, nor is his remorse or shame at his act described. There is no indication that, in Dogon terms, covering one's face is an appropriate expression of these emotions. Little is known of the ritual context of figures performing this gesture, or whether the aspects of the myth relating to

Dyongou Serou have any bearing on their function. Given that the entire question of how mythological content is expressed in Dogon sculpture remains largely unanswered, interpreting figures like this as a specific mythical being is problematical.

1. Quotation marks were used by Leiris in the original, making it unclear whether this was his own interpretation of the Musée de l'Homme figure or an assumption based on information collected among the Dogon. In an autobiographical essay originally published in 1939, Leiris was very much concerned with the idea of shame and with transcending the limitations society places on the individual, especially in regard to his sexual activities (Leiris, 1984). This concern may have colored his view of the Dogon image.

2. In *The Pale Fox*, Griaule and Dieterlen state that as the first person to die, Dyongou Serou is the source of the Dogon institutions that deal with death and masks, funerals, *dama* ceremonies, and the *sigi* ceremony held every sixty years (1986: 51). Earlier studies of Dogon masks do not mention Dyongou Serou at all, and the source of death among humanity is attributed to other mythical beings (Griaule, 1938; Dieterlen, 1941; Leiris, 1948). The existence of many versions of the same myth complicates the already problematical task of interpreting Dogon visual imagery through specific references to myth.

Published: Paris, Palais d'Orsay, 1977: lot 9.

22. SEATED FIGURE COVERING ITS FACE
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 5⅜ in. (13.7 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.3

The Dogon artist's ability to rearrange the human body to create a structured composition of geometric elements is epitomized by this tiny figure. A central cylinder constitutes both torso and seat; perfectly symmetrical L-shaped forms project in opposite directions from its midpoint to depict the bent legs and arms. The sacrificial materials coating this figure are dark, dense, and fine-grained.

Like the preceding sculpture, this figure raises its arms to cover its face. Since interpretations of this gesture based on Dogon myth have proved to be problematic, a more accurate meaning may perhaps be found by examining the gestures of everyday and ritual life among the Dogon. Grieving Dogon women, like people all over the world, bury their faces in their hands at funerals (Griaule, 1938: 281). Dogon figures are often placed on family ancestral altars (*vageū*), and it is possible that some may express the idea of mourning for the deceased relative through the gesture of covering the face. It has been suggested that kneeling female figures may similarly convey the family's grief (see no. 10).

This figure's gesture also accords with a detailed account of the installation ceremony of a *binu* priest witnessed in 1937 (Ganay, 1942: 35–45). During what must have been one of the most dramatic moments of the ritual, the new priest knelt on the roof of the *binu* sanctuary, surrounded by priests of other *binu* ancestors. Two of the priests held his *dugo*—the stone or iron pendant that is his insignia of office—above his head and poured millet porridge and chicken blood on it. With porridge and blood streaming over his head and shoulders, the priest came down from the roof and knelt before the entrance to the sanctuary. At this point he raised his hands to his face to wipe away the sacrificial liquids (Ganay, 1942: 39). Dogon figures in the shape of simple cylinders covered with sacrificial materials, in some ways similar to this example, have been found on *binu* altars, thus creating the context in which a reference to this particular ritual gesture would be understood (Ganay, 1942: 13–14). It is unclear to what extent Dogon art represents ritual gestures, just as it is not known how literally it illustrates myth, but this interpretation suggests an interesting direction for future research.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 3.

Published: Leiris and Delange, 1968: 223.

23. SEATED COUPLE
Wood, metal
H. 28¾ in. (73.0 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.15

Vertical and horizontal forms are linked together in this figure to create a tightly structured composition that makes evident the interdependence and symmetry of men's and women's roles in Dogon society. The two figures are almost identical. Their columnar torsos and thin cylindrical arms and legs are connected by the horizontal bridges created by the base and seat of the stool and by the man's right arm, which is wrapped around his mate's shoulder. The man's chest echoes the woman's breasts, and in both figures the shoulder blades and buttocks are treated as equivalent forms. Their faces, too, are similar, with lozenge-shaped eyes and mouths and arrowlike noses; even the cylindrical labret worn by the woman balances her companion's beard. The light tracing of incised scarification marks on their faces and torsos further unites the two figures, as do the metal rings they wear in their hair and ears.

The gestures and attributes of both figures are also equated. On the man's back is a quiver, reflecting his role as hunter or warrior. On the woman's back is a baby, evidence of her role as mother. The man's arms point simultaneously to his own genitals and to the woman's breast, acknowledging their dual roles in procreation and nurturing. The close equation between male and female expressed in this sculpture refers not only to the dynamics of Dogon family life, but also to the pairing of male and female beings in Dogon mythology and the sexual duality the Dogon see as a spiritual component of every individual (Griaule, 1947b).

This figure has been attributed to a carver or workshop responsible for several other figures executed in a similar style (New York, Center for African Art, 1986: 9–11). These figures are generally large and complicated, with carefully finished decorative surfaces that contrast with the rough scablike remains of sacrificial materials seen on many other Dogon figures. The size, complexity, and refinement of these figures suggest that they may not have been used as the material supports for the spirits of ancestors, like the figures placed on *vageũ*, *binu*, or *yaũpilũ* altars, but they were perhaps displayed at the funerals of wealthy and important Dogon men (see no. 14).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 37.

Published: Kan, 1973: 76; New York, Columbia University, 1974: 21; Vogel, 1979; DeMott, 1982: 29; Beaudoin, 1984: 73.

24. SEATED COUPLE
Wood, metal
H. 22⅜ in. (56.8 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.16

Though similar to the preceding figure in its tight, balanced construction, the carver of this seated couple has used predominantly rectilinear forms rather than curved ones. From the blocky feet and hands to the squared shoulders and chests and the straight sides of the faces, these figures are composed of cubic shapes arranged in a three-dimensional grid. Here again the male and female figures are made to seem as similar as possible, distinguished only by the woman's conical breasts, decorative facial scars, and profusion of armbands. Several other Dogon figures share elements of this style (Clouzot and Level [1926]: pl. XVII; Krieger, 1965: no. 10). Because they closely resemble the figures carved in relief on some *togu na* support posts (see no. 42), these figures may have originated in Dogon villages on the Séno Plain rather than on the Bandiagara cliffs.

Figures such as this and the sculpture in no. 23 are sometimes identified as the "primordial couple" (Flam, 1970; DeMott, 1982: 28–36). Accounts of Dogon cosmology trace the activities of sequential series of primordial couples, pairs of mythic male and female ancestors that include various Nommo, their "children," the *unum* or eight ancestors of mankind, and their respective descendants. Since so little is actually known of the meaning and use of these figures, terms such as "primordial couple" serve only to mask the true state of our knowledge.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 38.

25. MASK AND COSTUME: *KANAGA*
Mask: wood, fiber, hide, pigment
Costume: cloth, fiber, cowrie shells, beads, buttons
H. (of mask) 38¼ in. (97.2 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1987
1987.74a–i

One of the most popular types of masks in the Sanga region, where Marcel Griaule undertook his classic study of Dogon masks, is the type known as *kanaga* (see figs. 11 and 12). Like other Dogon masks, *kanaga* masks are worn at rituals called *dama*, whose goal is to transport the souls of deceased family members away from the village and to enhance the prestige of the deceased and his descendants by magnificent masked performances and generous displays of hospitality. In 1935 Griaule witnessed a *dama* ritual in which twenty-nine out of a total of seventy-four masks were of the *kanaga* type (1938: 357 n. 2). *Kanaga* masks are still well represented in the contemporary adapted dances staged in the Dogon area today (Imperato, 1971). *Kanaga* masks are characterized by a wooden superstructure in the form of a double-barred cross with short vertical elements projecting from the tips of each horizontal bar.

This *kanaga* mask was collected in Mali by Lester Wunderman, complete with its costume elements. (Similar costumes are also worn with other Dogon masks.) When the mask is worn, the back of the dancer's head is covered with a hood of plaited fiber strips, alternating black and yellow, with a ruff of red and yellow fibers framing the face and a short fiber fringe at the bottom edge. The dancer wears a vest made of black strip-woven cloth and red broadcloth strips embroidered with white cowrie shells; strands of glass and plastic beads dangle from its edges. Larger and more elaborate than most vests worn with *kanaga* masks, this one has a greater abundance of cowries, which indicate wealth and beauty. The *kanaga* dancer also wears a pair of trousers made of indigo-dyed, strip-woven cotton cloth, over which he ties a long skirt of curly, loosely strung, black-dyed sansevieria fibers and short overskirts of straight red and yellow fibers. Fiber armbands are worn at the wrist and elbows, and the dancer also carries a fly whisk and either a short staff or a knife. For a traditional *dama*, the preparation and dyeing of the fibers are undertaken with as much secrecy and ritual as the carving of the wooden mask.

Griaule was initially told that the *kanaga* mask represents a bird with white wings and black forehead (Griaule, 1938: 470), but he later came to see this literal interpretation as characteristic of the first level of knowledge, that of the uninitiated. The deeper meaning of the *kanaga* mask apparently pertains both to God, the crossbars being his arms and legs, and to the arrangement of the universe, with the upper crossbar representing the sky and the lower one the earth (Griaule, 1951: 17). The disparity between these two interpretations illustrates the gaps in our understanding of Dogon art. Despite the wealth of information Griaule provided about Dogon masks, many questions remain to be answered, such as the reasons for depicting certain subjects and not others, the relationship of the individual masks to each other and to the meaning of the *dama* ritual as a whole, and the extent to which the various levels of meaning embodied in the mask are communicated to their wearers and viewers.

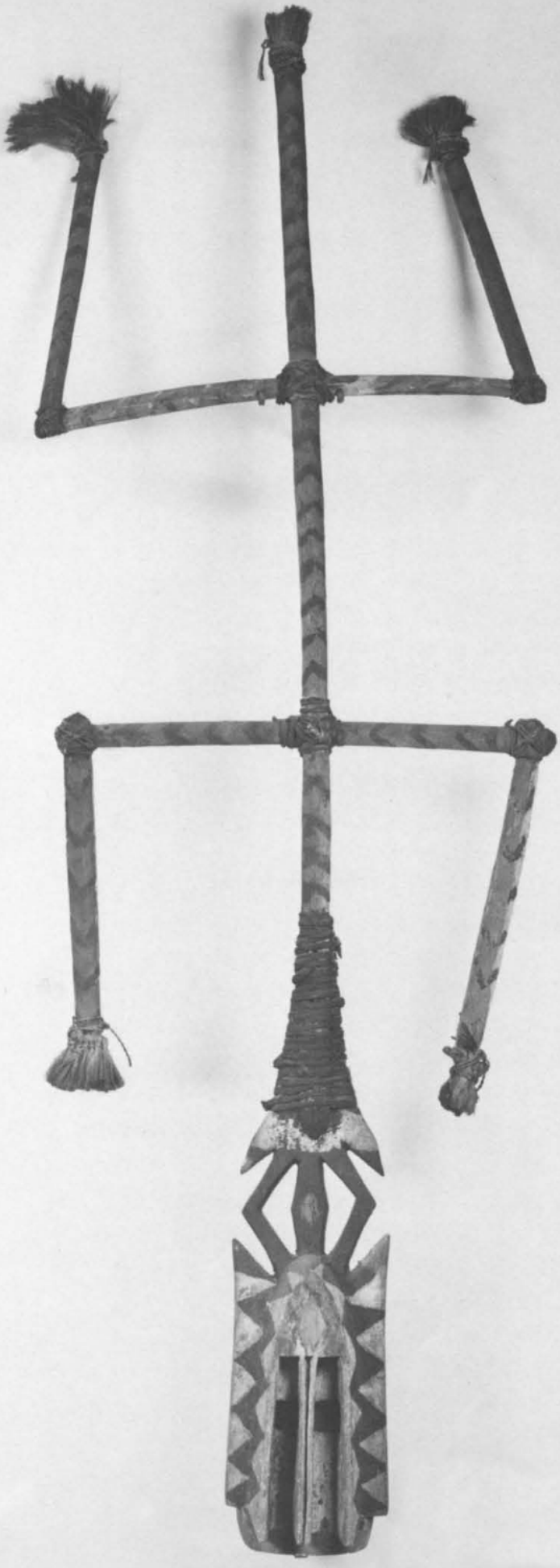
26. MASK: *SIM*
Wood, hide, fiber, pigment
H. 65 in. (165.1 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.39

Similar in form to the *kanaga* mask, the superstructure of the *sim* mask is taller and more flexible; it is made out of wood from a palm tree, rare in the Dogon area. Chevrons and triangles have been painted on the thin branches of this example, and fiber tufts sprout from each of its tips. This *sim* mask is unusual in that the vertical elements attached to the ends of the lower crossbar point downward; in most examples they point upward like those on the crossbar above.

The face of the *sim* mask is typical of many Dogon wooden masks. A rectangular box with an arched forehead, it has two deeply hollowed channels in front, in which the eye holes have been cut. The edges of the box extend upward at the top, forming small "ears." A pierced, diamond-shaped section links the mask with its tall superstructure, which is lashed to it with strips of hide. The mask's face is said to represent an antelope, while the top depicts a tall, thin spirit in human form whose body is constantly swaying, an apt subject for this fragile and ungainly mask.

Sim masks were rare in Sanga in the 1930s when Griaule did his research on Dogon masks. The dancer of the *sim* mask wears a costume similar to that of the *kanaga* mask, although without the elaborate cowrie-embroidered vest, and their dances are similar, too. Among the most strenuous of Dogon dances, they require the dancer to swing the mask around the axis of his body, and to beat the ground with the tip of the superstructure (Griaule, 1938: 436, 707).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 100.



27. ANTELOPE MASK: *WALU*
Wood, pigment
H. 19⅜ in. (49.2 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1979
1979.541.7

For the *dama*, or final commemorative ceremony for an important Dogon elder, hundreds of masked dancers perform, creating a brilliantly colored, ever-changing spectacle of sculpture, costume, song, and dance. During his research in the 1930s Marcel Griaule documented more than seventy different mask types, representing animals, birds, human characters, and abstract concepts, which he considered to be a visual summary of the world surrounding the Dogon people. Griaule saw the *dama* ceremony as a stunning materialization of the close links between contemporary Dogon society and the mythical time when masks were first acquired and used to counteract the negative effects of death (Griaule, 1938: 790). By reenacting the behavior of their mythic ancestors, the Dogon strive to restore order to their world after the disruption caused by death.

Antelope masks, among the most popular Dogon masks, are admired by the Dogon for their beauty and the strength of their performance. The face of the mask is usually a rectangular box, like that of the *sim* mask, but in this example the artist has completely opened up the face, eliminating the two channels for the eyes and adding a short, arrow-shaped nose. The result, though lighter and more delicate than many examples, retains the architectonic quality that characterizes Dogon masks. The costume worn with the antelope mask resembles that of the *kanaga* mask; it consists of fiber hood, skirts, armbands, and fiber bandoliers crossed over the chest. The dancer holds two short sticks with which he scratches the ground, imitating the behavior of antelope during their mating displays, but also resembling men hoeing the fields to make them fruitful (DeMott, 1982: 113).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 93.

28. FOREIGN WARRIOR MASK: *SAMANA*
Wood, pigment
H. 16⅝ in. (42.2 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1979
1979.541.6

This mask is very similar to one collected by Marcel Griaule in 1935 and identified as a Samo, a member of a neighboring ethnic group with a reputation for aggressive, warlike behavior (Griaule, 1938: 582). Dogon artists depict many human characters in their masks, such as *hogons*, *binu* priests, elders, young people, craft specialists (including smiths, leatherworkers, hunters, and healers), and foreigners, such as Bamana, Fulani, Tuareg, Europeans, and Muslim marabouts. Most of these characters are represented by masks made entirely out of fiber and cloth (see fig. 12); only a few human characters are portrayed in wood. While all of these human masks are somewhat similar in form, wooden *samana* warrior masks are usually distinguished by three long vertical scarification marks on each cheek.

The *samana* warrior mask has a special role in the masked dances of the *dama* ceremony, especially those that take place on the public plaza of the village as opposed to the house of the man being commemorated. The dances on the public plaza have a more secular character than those performed at the dead man's house, which are intended to encourage his soul to leave the village (Griaule, 1938: 89). The *samana* mask dancer wears a cotton tunic beneath his fiber skirt and holds a sword and a lance in his hands. His performance, more like a pantomime or skit than other Dogon dances, includes a mock battle with an imaginary enemy in which the dancer eventually falls to the ground as if dead, greatly amusing the crowd of spectators. At other times the dancer interacts with the audience, speaking to them in the Samo dialect, sharing tobacco with the men and joking rudely with performers wearing female masks (Griaule, 1938: 374, 574–76, 711). The performance of the *samana* warrior mask is among the most highly appreciated by the Dogon, and although its comic antics contrast with the solemnity of the occasion, the respect and admiration inspired by the dancer's skill accord with one of the goals of the *dama*, which is to enhance the prestige and reputation of the sponsoring lineage.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 92.

Published: Leiris and Delange, 1968: 273.

29. STANDING FIGURE
Iron
H. 8⅜ in. (21.3 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

More detailed than most Dogon iron sculptures, this figure has much in common with Dogon wood sculptures, which are made by the same artists, blacksmiths. The figure's wide, arrow-shaped nose and lozenge-shaped eyes placed low on the sides of the face are features seen in some Dogon wood sculpture, as is the prominent, cylindrical navel (New York, Center for African Art, 1986: no. 6). The chiseled zigzag lines and X-patterns on the front of the torso resemble those incised on many kinds of Dogon wood objects, including figures. Three rows of chiseled zigzag lines also decorate this figure's lower back.

In spite of these similarities, the way in which the figure's limbs and body have been manipulated epitomizes Dogon iron sculpture. The elongated torso, a rectangular rod of iron, has been split into two short ribbonlike legs, which bend with a graceful waving motion that defies bone, flesh, and muscle, a radical departure from the architectonic quality of Dogon wood sculpture. The arms are long, curved loops of iron, reflecting the flexible nature of metal hammered and bent when red-hot. The right hand, its fingers spread, seems weighted down by the dangles suspended from the wrist, and the left arm terminates in a hook, which clasps similar dangles. Dangles like these are also found on *gobo*, iron hooks that focus and attract spiritual forces in Dogon sanctuaries.

This figure is enigmatic in many ways. Two tusklike forms project from the shoulders; they may be interpreted as breasts or as medicine-filled horns. As with many other Dogon human and animal figures and figurative staffs, it is not known whom this sculpture portrays or what ritual context it was made for. Yet it remains a masterpiece of the Dogon blacksmith's art, fusing the decorative treatment of surfaces reserved for some works in wood with the spare and succinct elegance of iron sculpture.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 4.

Published: Beaudoin, 1984: 73.

30. WRAPPED FIGURE
Iron, cotton thread, cotton cloth, hide thong, fiber cord, sacrificial materials
H. 9⅞ in. (25.1 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Reduced to a pair of exuberantly upraised arms with wide, splayed hands, a long neck, and a head with an open mouth and only the barest indication of eyes and nose, this figure exemplifies the minimalism of Dogon iron sculpture. An X-ray shows that it was thickly wound with thread before being covered with a band of woven cotton cloth and encrusted with sacrificial materials. Three pairs of thick cotton cords were then wrapped around the cloth body; these were probably used to bind the figure to other objects on each side, although the cords have been cut and the object detached from its original setting. Now visible on the sides are areas of cloth that had once been protected from the sacrificial coating, and one can clearly distinguish woven indigo and white stripes with diamond-shaped weft floats, a typical pattern in Dogon textiles.

The figure's energetic gesture is in harmony with the power-laden materials that compose it. The sacrificial coating on the exterior, for example, represents a renewal and strengthening of the forces that were incorporated in the figure through the act of wrapping it with thread. Among the Bamana people, who have much in common with the Dogon, the act of binding or tying, *siri*, is often the most crucial step in the creation of a *boli*, a ritual object meant to contain and focus spiritual forces (McNaughton, 1979: 24; Brett-Smith, 1983: 59). As the string or cloth is wound or tied around a core, the maker's spoken words and saliva—both vehicles of power—are bound to it. While it is not known for what context this figure was intended, a related object consisting of a hooked iron staff wrapped with cotton cloth is known to have formed part of an altar dedicated to Lebe, the primordial ancestor whose cult is concerned with the annual regeneration of the fields and the growth of crops (Ouane, 1941: 87).

31. STAFF: HALF FIGURE
Iron
H. 19¼ in. (48.9 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Dogon figurative iron staffs are spare and simple, consisting of a cylindrical shaft surmounted by a figure reduced to its minimal components. Often, as in this example, the legs and body are omitted entirely, and the figure's essence is expressed in its featureless face and outstretched or upraised arms. The hands are either curled inward like hooks, as in this example, or are wide and flattened, with fingers splayed. Here the arms curve gently upward and forward, their jointless motion reminiscent of the effortless sway of water plants. The figure's sharply jutting beard is the sole indication that it depicts a male elder.

Gobo are nonfigurative iron staffs with outspread branches ending in hooks; they are found embedded in the stones of altars dedicated to Nommo, the mythical being who represents order in the universe, and fixed to the facade of sanctuaries of the *binu*, totemic ancestors who derive part of their vital force from Nommo (see fig. 8). The word *gobo* means "to grasp" (Calame-Griaule, 1968: 108), and the function of the *gobo* hooks is to attract and retain the spirit's vital force and its manifestation in rain (Dieterlen and Ganay, 1942: 30–31; Ganay, 1942: 13; Griaule, 1965: 103; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 386). Figurative staffs such as this one, made of iron like *gobo* hooks and equipped with arms outstretched like the ends of the hooks, may well have a related function and meaning.

Exhibited: New York, Galerie Kamer, 1964; Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 27.

Published: Laude, 1971: 80.

32. STAFF: STANDING FIGURE
Iron
H. 16 in. (40.6 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

The figure atop this iron staff bears the fluid, undulating limbs characteristic of Dogon iron sculpture. Its left hand is flattened, with spread fingers; its right hand is hooked onto an iron band wrapped around the wrist. The facial features, although spare, are executed with surprising delicacy. A few grooves serve to delineate the tapering coiffure, and tiny breasts protrude, leaving open the question of gender.

The contexts in which staffs like this are used are not well documented. Similar figurative staffs surmounted by a lance blade have been found in *binu* sanctuaries, where *gobo* hooks and many miniature iron implements also abound (Griaule, 1937: 75; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 145, 385). The *hogon* employs several kinds of iron objects as well, including canes (Desplagnes, 1907: 321*bis*, 322) and *gobo* hooks planted on his rooftop (Dieterlen, 1982: 70–71). Figurative iron staffs were apparently also embedded in the bricks in front of the *hogon*'s house (Lafayette, IN, Purdue University, 1975: 13). Since many of these iron objects —the *gobo*, for example—are intended to attract and secure spiritual forces, as well as rain and good harvests, they would be particularly useful to the *hogon*, who must marshall the forces of the universe to benefit his community.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 41.

33. STAFF: FIGURE WITH SHIELD
Iron
H. 47¼ in. (121.3 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

The serpentine shaft of this iron staff fuses with the figure's upright torso, from which boneless legs curve outward. The figure has grasping hooks instead of hands and the left one is curled around the handle of a circular shield. The figure conveys the tension often seen in Dogon iron sculpture between a tough, intractable material and forms that seem fluid and malleable.

Previous interpretations of the figure on this staff have relied upon an episode in the Dogon myth of creation. In this segment of the myth, the Nommo who guided the celestial ark to earth is identified with the first blacksmith, who, noting that the ark lacked fire, stole embers from the sun. To retaliate against this disruption of order, the Nommo remaining in heaven hurled firebrands at the blacksmith/Nommo, who protected himself with his round leather bellows, which is believed to be depicted on this staff (Griaule, 1965: 42–43; Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 40). The Dogon, who have had ample occasion for warfare throughout their five-hundred-year occupation of the cliffs, make use of circular shields made of leather (Paulme, 1940: 273). It is likely that the figure on this iron staff depicts a Dogon warrior wielding such a shield.

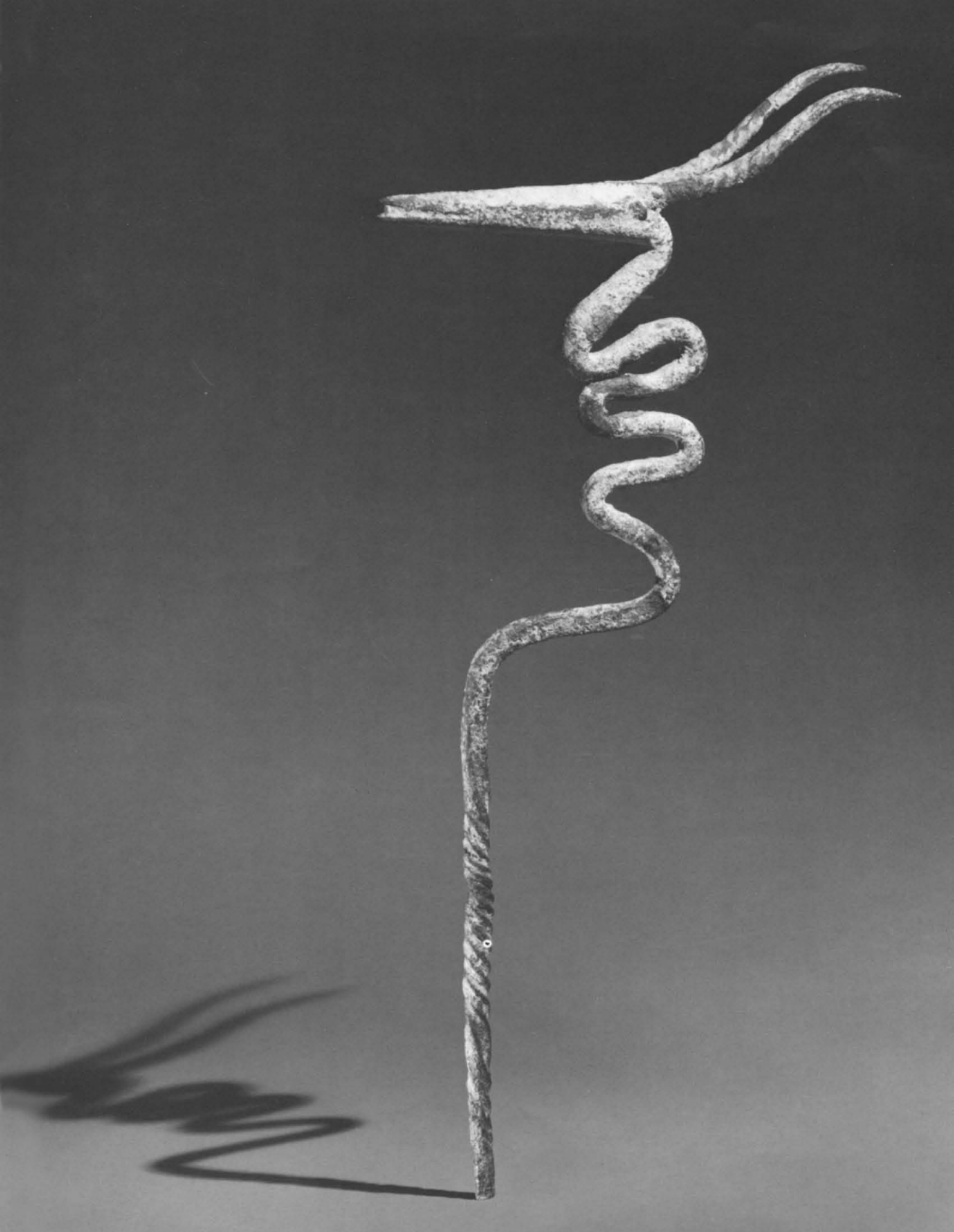
Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 40.

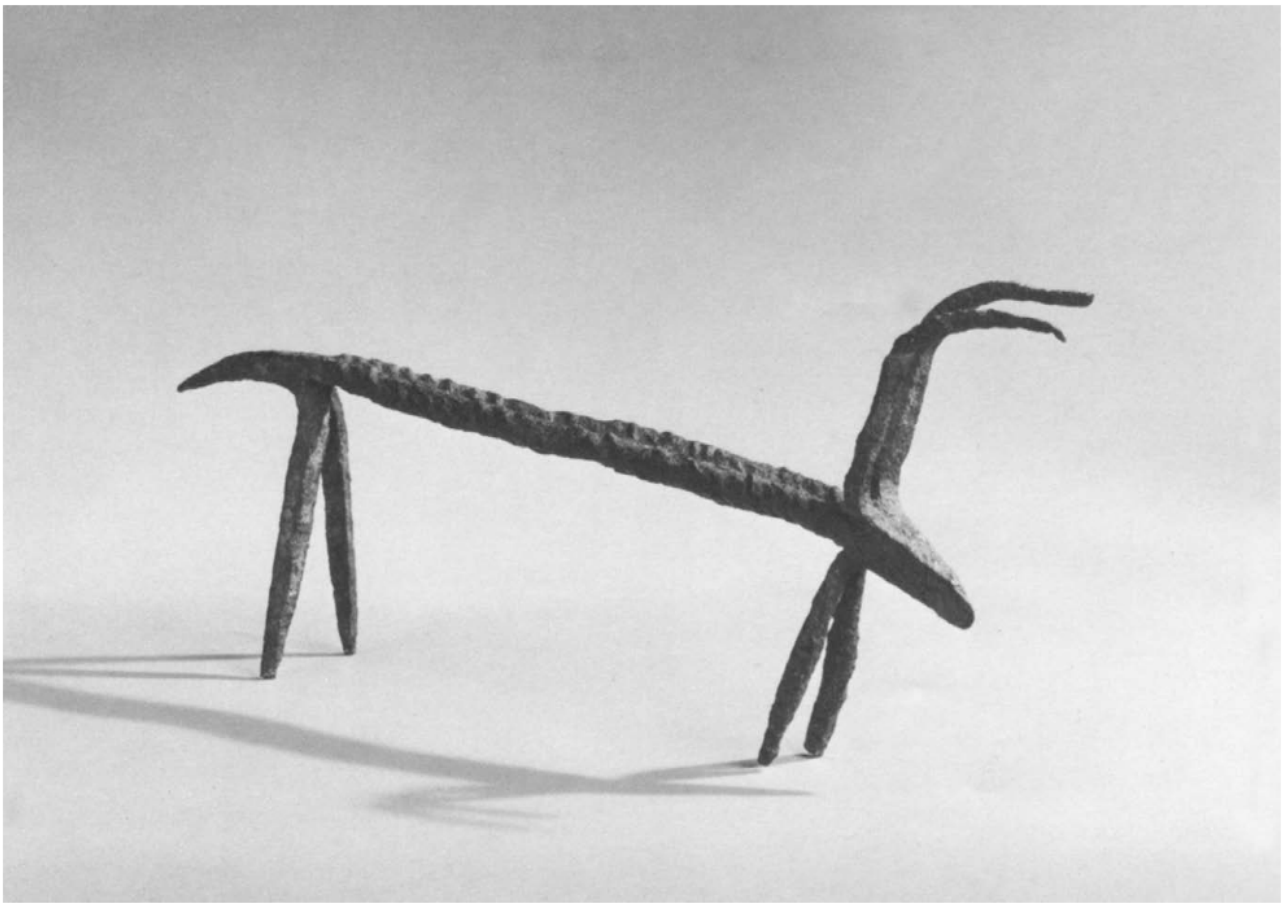
34. Staff: Figure with Foliate Forms
Iron
H. 34½ in. (87.6 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

The figure on this staff stands on an iron support that wraps around the top of the long shaft. The figure's twisted arms are raised upward, and the fingers of the wide hands are outstretched. Two broad, flattened leaflike forms sprout from the shaft, flanking the figure and spreading outward above his head with their ends curled. These forms are suggestive of growing plants, which for the Dogon people thrive on the moisture provided by Nommo, the primordial being who brought order, purity, and fertility to the universe and who is manifested in life-giving water.

In Dogon myth, the first blacksmith was created by Amma from the blood and umbilical cord of Nommo (Dieterlen, 1965: 10, 16; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 405–6). Germaine Dieterlen was told that "Nommo and blacksmith are of red blood; Nommo and blacksmith are twins, both are red like copper." This relationship gives the smiths Nommo-like powers, most notably the ability to bring rain, said to be Nommo's semen. This association between Nommo and the blacksmith in Dogon thought may be expressed in objects made of iron—the smith's material—placed in *binu* sanctuaries, on the roof of the *hogon*'s dwelling, and on altars dedicated to Nommo, where they attract the rain, grain, and life force that come from Nommo and his "twin," the blacksmith. This staff, with its suggestion of foliate forms, may also serve such a purpose.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 20.





35. Stake with Antelope Head
Iron
H. 8¼ in. (21.0 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

In this exceptionally delicate work the Dogon blacksmith has given the thin "line" of iron a few surprising twists and curves, creating a composition that keeps the tension between motion and stability in perfect equilibrium. Above the twisted shaft an elegantly elongated antelope head is poised upon a meandering snakelike neck. Formed of narrow, hammered facets, the head has a tapered snout and slightly open jaws. The springlike energy of the compressed, coiled neck is released in the graceful arc of the horns, which are twisted at their bases, where the texture of the shaft is repeated. This short, sharply pointed stake may have been inserted into agglomerations of stones, earth cones, wooden figures, *gobo* hooks, and other objects that are placed on altars dedicated to Nommo and the *binu*.

Exhibited: New York, Galerie Kamer, 1964.

Published: Laude, 1971: 191.

36. Animal
Iron
W. 7⅛ in. (18.1. cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Like the quick strokes of a skilled draftsman's pen, a few lengths of forged iron were sufficient for a Dogon blacksmith to suggest the form of this hoofed animal. Two parallel bars of twisted iron form the body and end in a short, pointed tail. The straight legs, square rods except for the twisted left foreleg, branch out from the body, evidence of the blacksmith's skill in pulling and manipulating the metal while it is red-hot. The flat, blunt-nosed head seems to be lowered, an impression reinforced by the shorter forelegs and long, sharp, forward-curving horns. Small, freestanding animal figures like this may have been placed in shrines of totemic ancestors, or *binu*, since other miniature iron sculptures depicting a variety of objects, including blacksmiths' tools, hunters' bows, crowns, and sandals, have been seen in that context (Griaule, 1937: 75).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 82.

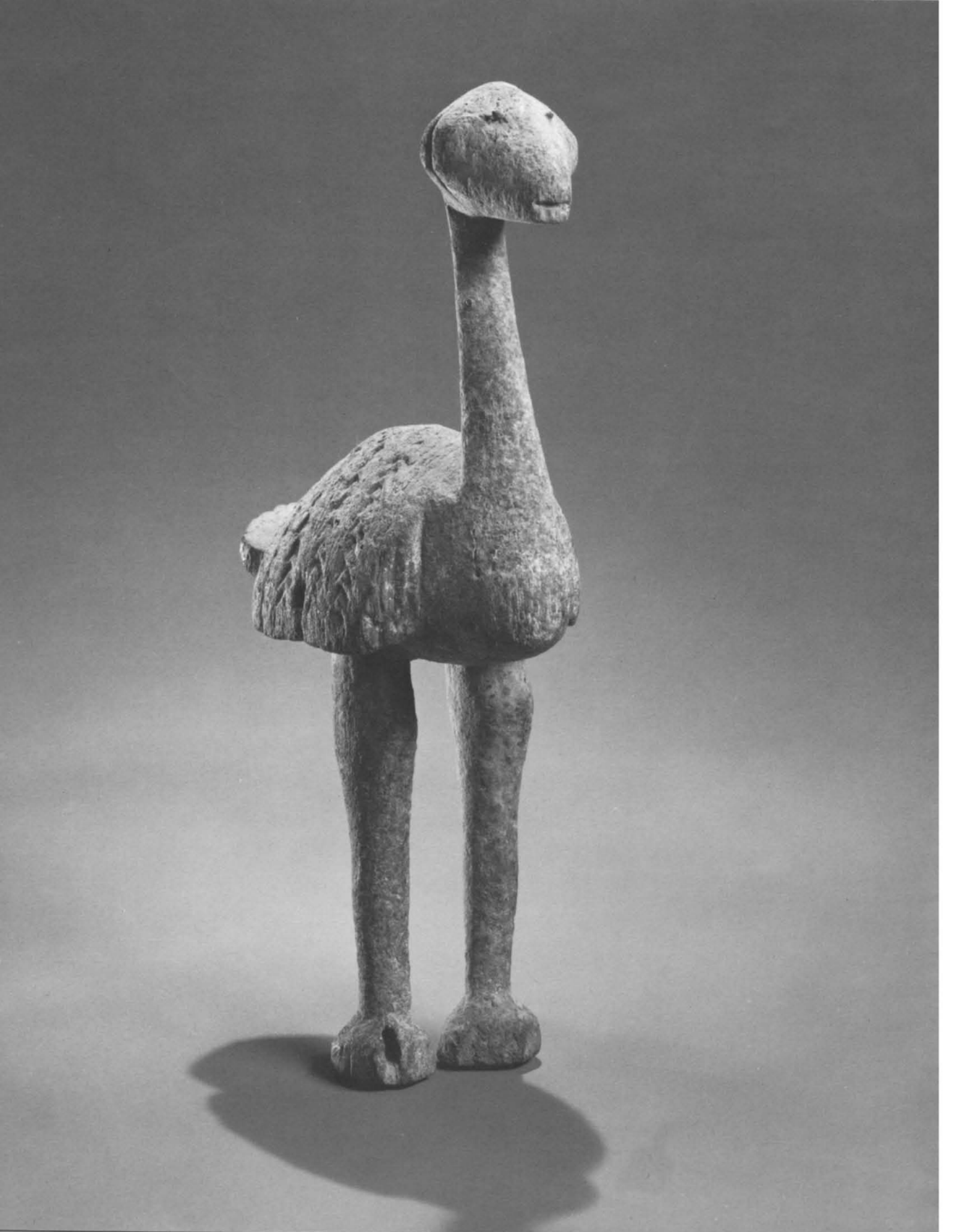
37. HORSE
Iron
W. 7⅞ in. (20.0 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

This iron sculpture may represent a horse, an animal that figures prominently in Dogon myth and ritual. Its long, slightly sagging back is supported by slender, dainty legs, and the curved profile of the animal's massive head is counterbalanced by that of the strong neck. As noted in no. 6, in the harsh landscape of the Bandiagara cliffs the horse is a luxury available only to wealthy merchants and chiefs (Griaule, 1938: 10). A horse is also used to carry the corpse of a *hogon* at his funeral (Desplagnes, 1907: 332). It occupies a privileged place in Dogon myth, as the first animal to leave the heavenly ark from which the earth was populated and organized (Griaule, 1948: 122). According to some versions of this mythic event, the horse that pulled the ark to water immediately after its arrival on earth was none other than Nommo transformed into one of his principal animal manifestations (Dieterlen and Ganay, 1942: 9; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 474). Even in a sculpture as spare and economical as this one, the artist has suggested the elevated status of the horse in Dogon society.

38. CAMEL
Iron
W. 4⅞ in. (12.4 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Standing on thin, ribbonlike legs, this sculpture captures the ungainly appearance of a hump-backed, long-necked camel. Not a frequent sight on the Bandiagara cliffs, camels were certainly common in the trading centers that surround the Dogon area from Jenne to Timbuktu. Although European visitors to the area have been struck by the isolation and inaccessibility of the cliffs, the Dogon have for centuries been part of economic, political, and cultural networks that extend throughout the Western Sudan and across the Sahara Desert (Desplagnes, 1907: 344–47).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 83.



39. OSTRICH
Wood, iron
H. 8¼ in. (20.9 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.50

This charming sculpture represents a carefully observed ostrich, a bird the Dogon associate with the *hogon*. Some *hogon*s raise these giant, flightless birds and ride them as part of their installation rituals. Ostrich skins, with feathers intact, are spread out on the mud-brick platform in front of the *hogon*'s house, creating a seat appropriate for a person of his importance (Griaule, 1938: 7, n. 3; Dieterlen, 1982: 73–74).

In this neatly executed sculpture the artist has captured the essential features of the ostrich—long legs with powerful thighs, a slender neck thrust slightly forward by the massive chest, an ovoid body, and magnificent plumage. On each wing are four rows of delicately incised chevrons that suggest the bird's overlapping feathers. The broad, fan-shaped tail, notched along the edge, is raised, and even the soft underbelly, partially hidden by the wings, is indicated. Tiny iron pegs have been inserted in the eyes and neck, and the figure bears speckles of brown and cream-colored sacrificial materials. Louis Desplagnes, who noted that animal figures are found on family altars dedicated to the founding ancestors and totemic animals, photographed one such altar with small figures of birds, which he identified as the ostrich totem (Desplagnes, 1907: 273, and fig. 148).

Published: Guggenheim, 1974: no. 019.

40. OSTRICH
Wood, brass
H. 3⅜ in. (8.6 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Simpler and more streamlined than the example in no. 39, the sharply angled head and neck and forward-thrusting breast of this tiny figure create a zigzag composition, which evokes the posture and gait of an ostrich. According to one etymology, the Dogon word for ostrich, *ogo yono*, derives from the word meaning "to waddle," a swaying motion that is suggested by this figure's mismatched legs, the right one straight and the left bowed (Calame-Griaule, 1968: 210). Like other small human and animal figures, this sculpture may have been intended for placement on altars dedicated to a family's real (*vageū*) and totemic (*binu*) ancestors (Desplagnes, 1907: 273).

Published: Guggenheim, 1974: no. 026.

41. SUPPORT POST
Wood
H. 51¼ in. (130.2 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Posts like this one support the roof beams of *togu na*, open-sided shelters forbidden to women where Dogon men meet to rest, converse, and discuss issues of importance to the community (see fig. 1). Each village or village quarter has a *togu na*, said to be one of the first structures built when a village is founded (Paulme, 1940: 124). The ceiling of a *togu na* is low, too low for a man to stand up under, possibly because "'true' speech is uttered by a person sitting down. The position allows for the harmony of all the faculties" (Calame-Griaule, 1986: 63–64). *Togu na* roofs are made of neat stacks of millet stalks piled thick—sometimes over six feet deep—to keep the inside of the shelter dark and cool. The roof is supported by wooden beams held up by posts made of piled stones, mud bricks, or carved wood, as in this example.

Most of the carved wood *togu na* posts come from Dogon villages on the Séno Plain, a vast sandy expanse stretching from the foot of the Bandiagara cliffs to the Burkina Faso border (Brasseur, 1968: 395–97; Spini and Spini, 1976). Unlike the cliffs, the Séno Plain is fertile enough to support thick stands of trees, the source for these massive, rectangular, forked posts. The *togu na* posts are carved in relief, usually with figures of women with enormous conical breasts, but also with male figures and images of animals, masks, and other objects. In this example the woman's wide, square shoulders and fully rounded breasts dominate the post, and the long arms must detour around them in order to hang down at the sides. In contrast to the dramatic exaggeration of the breasts, the rest of the body is flat and carved in relatively low relief, except for a few slight but well-placed changes in plane or angle, as at the head, shoulders, hands, and knees.

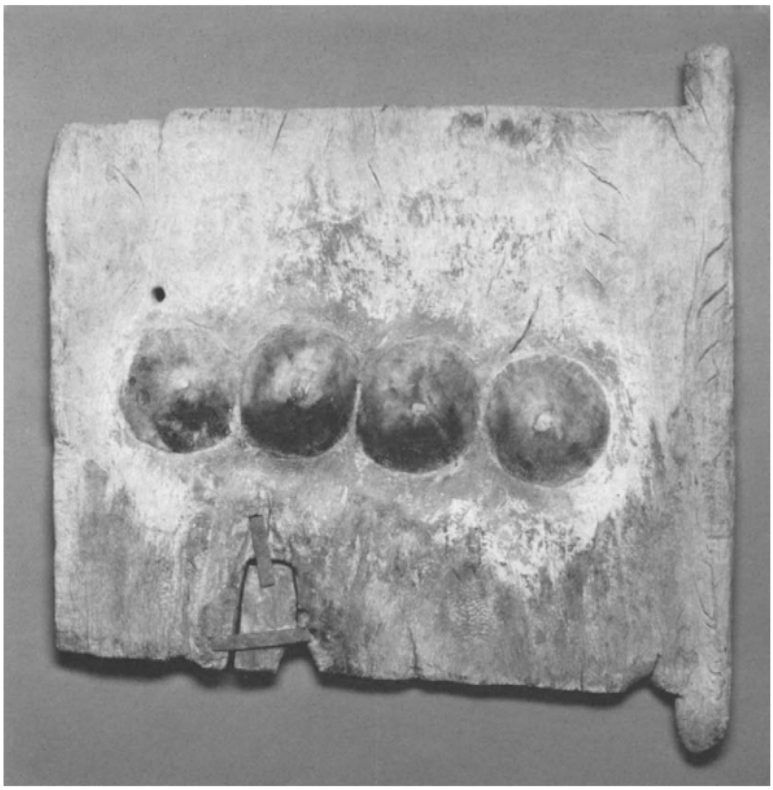
Published: Leiris and Delange, 1968: 188; New York, Columbia University, 1974: 77.

42. SUPPORT POST
Wood, metal
H. 75 in. (190.5 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1979
1979.541.5

The figures of the man and woman standing side by side on this *togu na* post seem more fully realized than the schematic low-relief figures most often seen on these posts. The rectangular, blocklike shape of the post itself is repeated in the figures' flat-sided, rectilinear bodies and heads. Their necks, arms, and legs have been cut away entirely from the block of wood, giving the figures a more independent existence. Their faces are also quite detailed, with metal tacks inserted in the eyes, long diamond-shaped noses, and pierced, square-cornered ears. The two figures are almost identical except for a band of cross-hatched scarification marks on each of the woman's cheeks and a row of incised lozenges down her torso. Beneath the figures are two pairs of "foot-prints," which are thought to represent Nommo's first steps as he left the ark and walked upon the earth (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 470).

In style, the two figures on this post resemble the male and female couple in no. 24, which displays the same geometric approach to the head and body and a similar proliferation of details. Like other *togu na* posts made of carved wood, this one probably comes from a village on the Séno Plain, south of the Bandiagara cliffs, where many new Dogon villages have been founded in the past century (Brasseur, 1968: 395). The *jemo* blacksmiths, who live primarily on the plain, do not work exclusively for the Dogon, which may explain why this post and the figure it resembles (no. 24) seem to share many features with the sculpture of the neighboring Bamana people.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 70.



43. SHUTTER
Wood, iron
H. 16⅝ in. (42.2 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.54

Small wooden shutters like this one are found on Dogon granaries—narrow, four-sided, mud-brick structures with domed and thatch-covered roofs (see fig. 6). Granaries outnumber almost all other types of buildings in Dogon villages, demonstrating the importance of preserving crops produced with the hard labor required in such a rocky landscape. Every family has several granaries, one for each of the wives and the rest for the head of the family, in which are stored reserves of millet, sorghum, rice, corn, fonio, beans, and other staples that will be used throughout the year. Personal valuables and family altars are sometimes also stored in granaries (Calame-Griaule, 1955; Brasseur, 1968: 378–92; N'Diaye, 1972; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 483). The shuttered windows, placed midway up the granary wall, provide access to the goods stored inside. Shutters are also used on some *binu* sanctuaries, on the upper-story rooms of large houses (*ginna;* see fig. 7), and on the houses inhabited by *hogons* (Calame-Griaule, 1955: 490; Saint-Priest, Galerie Municipale d'Exposition, 1982: nos. 37, 39; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 537).

Made of a single plank of wood or, more often, two planks joined at the side, the shutters swing open and shut on projecting pivots at the top and bottom that are set into depressions on the sill and lintel. The shutters are secured either by a wooden lock or by sealing the edges with mud. Though sometimes undecorated, granary shutters are often carved in relief with dense rows of human figures, birds, animals, and geometric motifs. This shutter is somewhat unusual in that the space around the main motif of four projecting breasts has been left empty, making them appear to float disembodied in a void. The motif suggests the vital importance of grain and women in Dogon society. Along with rain and millet, the most common requests in Dogon prayers are for wives and children, who will be nourished by the contents of the granary and who will also help to create future harvests, thus perpetuating the family.

44. SHUTTER
Wood, iron
H. 28½ in. (72.4 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.29

The elongated, symmetrically spread limbs of the lizard sprawled across this granary shutter create compartments in which human figures and small animals stand out in

relief. Of the six human figures on the shutter, one, to the left of the lizard's tail, holds its hands up to cover its face. The others stand with their knees bent (the space behind them is cut away), and their hands gesture downward in front of their thighs. Their faces are featureless, and they are constructed of identical components—projecting volumes that represent torso, breasts, hands, knees, and feet. Such simplified, geometrized figures, often repeated in series and arranged in bordered compartments, can be found not only on granary shutters but also on many other Dogon objects with relief decoration, such as stools, staffs, and wooden containers.

The meaning of such similar anonymous figures on granary shutters is not clear. The granary itself is often seen as a symbol of the celestial ark that figured in the creation and settlement of the earth, and the figures on granary shutters have been interpreted as the mythical beings who populated the ark and gave rise to the various Dogon lineages (New York, Galerie Kamer, 1964: 217; Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 537). However, the number of figures depicted on the doors, as well as their gestures and animal companions, varies greatly, so it seems unwise to draw too close an analogy with mythological events and characters.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 73.

45. Staff for Ritual Thief: *Yo Domolo*
Wood, hide
H. 28⅜ in. (72.1 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.69

Worn over the shoulder or held in the hand, curved staffs such as this are emblems of the society of *yona*, or "ritual thieves." The meaning of the institution of ritual theft has puzzled even those who have studied it most closely (Paulme, 1940: 290). Each Dogon clan has a ritual thief, designated by the clan's eldest member. The principal activity of the society seems to occur at the funeral of one of its members, when the *yona* all stalk the village, stealing and killing as many chickens, sheep, and goats as they can, to be sacrificed and eaten at the funeral ceremony. The burials of *yona* are much like those of ordinary men except that the *yona* dance in honor of their deceased colleague and sing about his past exploits in killing and eating the stolen domestic animals (Griaule, 1938: 332–35; Paulme, 1940: 290–96).

The staff of a ritual thief, called *yo domolo* ("thief's staff"), has a hooked shape similar to that of the ordinary club or staff (*domolo*) carried habitually by Dogon men over the shoulder (see fig. 7; Calame-Griaule, 1968: 71). *Domolo*, depicted in no. 1, are used as weapons and tools and are sometimes used as ritual objects in *binu* sanctuaries and other altars (see fig. 8). The thief's staff is much more elaborate than a plain *domolo*, with openwork, zigzag decoration along the top of the hook and, sometimes, human figures along the shaft. In this example, two figures, a male and a female, project in high relief, and their bent, cut-away knees continue the line of open zigzags above them. The strong, barlike forms that depict the figures' chests, hands, and feet also extend the series of zigzags.

In some *yo domolo* the shorter, hooked section of the staff resembles the head of a horselike animal with open jaws and pointed ears; this has been interpreted as a symbol of the horse that pulled Nommo's celestial ark to water after its fall to earth (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 485). Ogotemmêli, the Dogon elder who instructed Marcel Griaule in Dogon cosmology and religion, saw the ritual thieves and their staffs as a means of commemorating a different episode in the descent of the ark, one in which the mythical blacksmith stole embers from the sun in order to create fire for the benefit of mankind (Griaule, 1965: 193–94). Both of these interpretations raise a problem often encountered in discussions of Dogon art—how to apply elements of the Dogons' very complex cosmology, our understanding of which is itself pieced together from snippets obtained in research into a multitude of topics, to an object

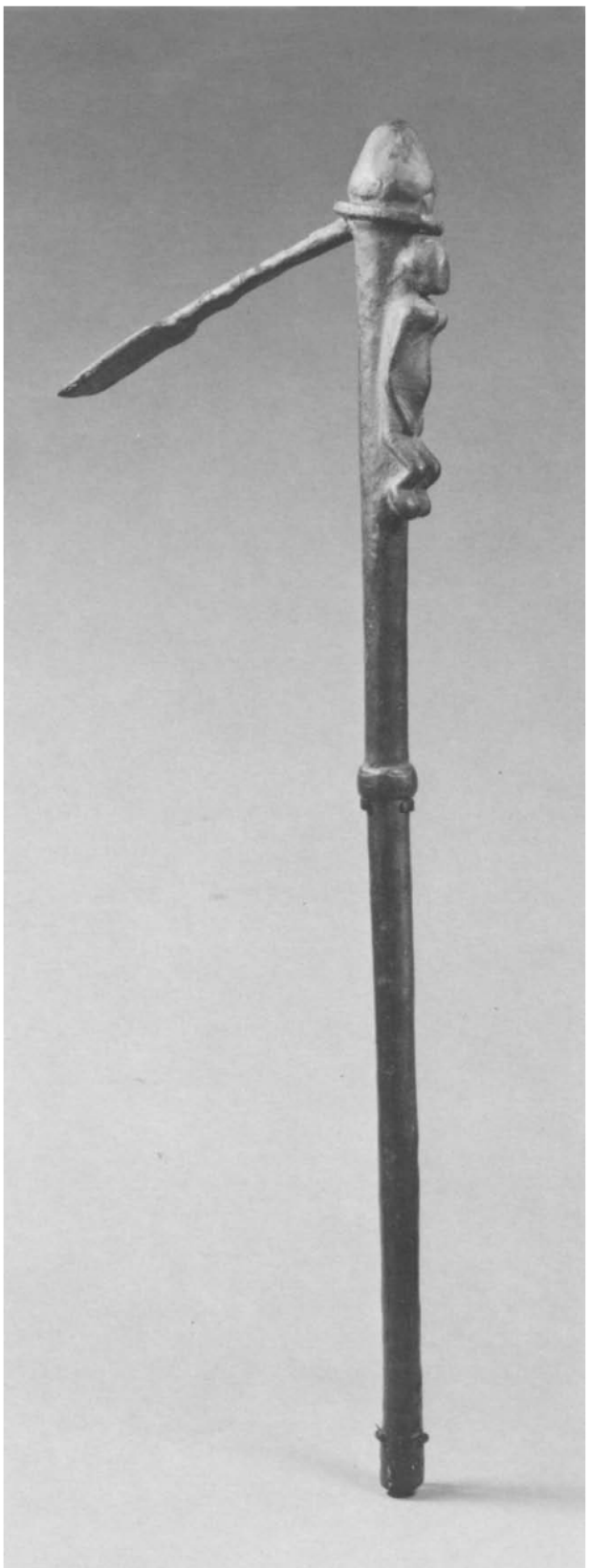
whose relationship to the myth is not known and whose function, history, and meaning in its own ritual context are not clearly understood.

46. CEREMONIAL ADZE
Wood, iron, sacrificial materials
H. 31 in. (78.7 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.18

The female figure carved in relief on the shaft of this adze resembles the generalized human figures carved on many other kinds of Dogon objects, including shutters, wooden containers, and stools. The figure's knees are bent and her long arms rest on her thighs; she has a featureless face, blocky chest, and slightly protruding torso. The simplified, geometric forms are hallmarks of Dogon sculptural style, but the lack of detail makes it difficult for us to assign a particular meaning to the figure. The handle of the adze ends in a large, blunt point, into which the ornate, non-functional iron blade is set; iron rings encircle the handle at the top and midpoint.

Dogon ritual specialists identified as *laggam* by Desplagnes sometimes carry an object described as an "axe-club with a sculpted handle" (Desplagnes, 1907: 333, figs. 164, 165). Although the illustrations of examples accompanying Desplagnes' description are not very clear, the general outlines seem to be similar to this example. The title *laggam* does not appear in recent literature about the Dogon, but Desplagnes' early account of these ritual specialists allows them to be tentatively identified as *binukedine,* the priests of *binu* ancestors. According to Desplagnes, *laggam* are concerned with totemic animals and are identified by the *dugo*, or stone pendants, which they must find while in a state of trance in order to be chosen for their position (1907: 332–36). The *binu* often contact their descendants through the intermediary of an animal that then becomes the totem of that family. The *binu* also provide a *dugo* to their descendants, which the *binukedine* must locate while in trance before he can accede to his title. L-shaped wooden *domolo* staffs are found in great number in *binu* shrines (Dieterlen, 1938; Ganay, 1941: 114,121; Ganay, 1942: 13,15). If the identification of the title *laggam* with the priest of *binu* is correct, it is possible that elaborate ceremonial adzes like this, used as staffs or emblems, can also be associated with the worship of these important ancestral spirits.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 45.



47. STAFF-SEAT: *DOLABA*
Wood, sacrificial materials
H. 17 in. (43.2 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.45

A special type of staff called *dolaba* is held by all the male participants in the *sigi* ceremony, a rite held every sixty years to commemorate the myth of the origin of death among the Dogon. During the many processions and dances that take place during the three weeks that *sigi* is celebrated in each region, the T-shaped staffs are held in the left hand; they are also used as seats during the frequent beer-drinking parts of the ceremony (see figs. 9 and 10). The following year, when the ritual moves to the next region along its path from the northeastern end of the Dogon cliffs to the southwestern end, a *dolaba* is the material symbol of the transmission. After the *sigi* is completed, the *dolaba* is saved until the death of its owner. When a man's *dama*, or final commemorative ceremony, is celebrated, his *dolaba* is removed from his house and transferred to a rock shelter, just as the man's soul is ritually transported to its final resting place outside the village. The *dolaba* seems to represent the man's full participation in rituals essential to his community (Griaule, 1938: 194, 202–14, 372–74).

Dolaba made for *olubaru*, or initiates of the Dogon men's mask society, are said to be more ornate than those of ordinary participants (Griaule, 1938: 196). (Very few Dogon men are actually initiated, although all men participate in the rituals associated with the masks.) This example is particularly elaborate in its imagery, with a human figure carved in relief on each side of the shaft and a snake-like openwork zigzag carved below the seat, each end of which terminates in a human head (one of the heads in this example has been lost). The entire staff-seat has been covered with sacrificial materials, which may include chicken blood, sesame and *sa* oil, red plant dye, and red earth. The *nyama*, or vital force, contained in these ingredients passes through the *dolaba* to the person who sits upon it and accounts for the great increase in spiritual energy experienced by a person who has participated in this most important and difficult of Dogon rituals (Griaule, 1940a: 80).

Published: Guggenheim, 1974: no. 010.

48. STOOL
Wood
H. 12⅝ in. (32.1 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

In their daily life Dogon people sit on low wooden stools with round seats supported by several short, angled supports (Pern, 1982: 31). In some Dogon sculptures male elders or male and female couples (such as no. 23) are represented sitting on somewhat higher, more elaborate stools supported by caryatid figures, like this one. In this example the dual disks of the seat and base are connected by a central post and five curved supports. Pairs of female figures with their arms raised are depicted on four of these supports, while on the fifth a lizard is shown, its head pointing downward. The figures, identical in their forms, create a sense of symmetry and balance; on each support the long, thin, unbroken vertical lines of the legs and raised arms extend on either side of the jagged surface created by the heads, projecting breasts, prominent navels, and bent knees. The figures' faces, though small, are carefully executed and resemble the features of many larger Dogon figures, such as the horse and rider and the woman with mortar and pestle (nos. 6 and 7).

In its composition this stool and others like it have been compared to the Dogon conception of the universe as two parallel disks—heaven and earth—connected by an iron rod through their centers (Griaule, 1938: 44; Brooklyn Museum, 1973: opp. no. 35). These stools have also been seen as images of the ark in which Amma, the Creator, sent to earth the eight ancestors of mankind (Dieterlen, 1981: 19). However, until more information can be gathered to situate the contexts of these stools in terms of their owners and their ritual or domestic uses, the meaning of the caryatid figures must remain unclear.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 35.

Published: Short, 1975: 14.

49. Two Bowls
Wood
Diam. 9⅜, 7⅞ in. (23.8, 20.0 cm.)
Left: The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.31
Right: The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

A major theme throughout more than a half century of Dogon studies has been the connection between the complex religious beliefs of the Dogon and humble objects made for everyday use (Dieterlen, 1957: 139). These two well-worn wooden bowls are no exception. Called *bana*, such bowls are most commonly used to serve thick millet porridge, which is a staple of the Dogon diet. They are also placed on family altars (Desplagnes, 1907: 273), and during funerals they are included in public assemblages of the dead person's belongings, which are said to represent the deceased (Dieterlen and Calame-Griaule, 1960: 55). A similar bowl, its exterior smeared with shea butter as in these two examples, was seen in use at the *dama*, or commemorative rites of a *yasigine*, the only woman initiated into the men's mask society (Griaule, 1938: 386). Perhaps the close daily contact of the bowls with the deceased and the fact that they nourished and sustained the body, the part of the deceased that is now gone, explain their presence in these funeral and memorial contexts.

The decoration on the outside of these two bowls demonstrates the Dogon preference for linear and geometric motifs that break up the surface into uniform fields. In both examples, neatly bordered bands of finely incised diagonal lines flank a central band, which is filled with either a delicate row of chevrons or a more roughly executed zigzag line. In the bowl on the left, these bands are interrupted in four places by opposed triangles, whose plain, unincised interiors are enlivened by symmetrically placed triangular gouges. In the bowl on the right, three rectangular fields, also punctuated by gouges, are spaced around the side opposite the handle. The motifs used on these bowls are found on many other kinds of Dogon objects, from bracelets to the facades of buildings. They show the Dogon taste for order, symmetry, repetition, and compartmentalization, principles that also permeate their cosmology and religion.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 86 (left) and no. 88 (right).

Published: Pearlstein, 1986: 85 (left).

50. LIDDED BOX WITH ANIMAL'S HEAD
Wood
L. 22⅛ in. (56.2 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.19ab

Standing on sturdy, slightly bowed legs, this lidded box in the shape of an animal exemplifies a common characteristic of Dogon art: the fusion of three-dimensional human and animal forms with two-dimensional geometric motifs. The original function of this box is unknown. It differs from the flat-bottomed, unlidded, troughlike vessels thought to represent the heavenly ark and used for holding sacrificial meat (see no. 51). The barrel-shaped body is also unlike another type of wooden Dogon container—elaborate, hemispherical, lidded bowls surmounted by equestrian figures and often supported by horses as well. These latter bowls belong to the *hogon* and are used to contain the food consumed when he first takes office (Paulme, 1940: 208; Dieterlen, 1982: 70).

Every surface of this object has been divided into compartments for decoration. Wide bands of zigzag lines split the body neatly into three sections; on one side these sections are filled with X's aligned with great care, while on the other side the horizontal stripes in each section are staggered, like the designs on some African strip-woven textiles. The lid is similarly divided by bands filled with zigzags. In the spaces formed by this grid are figures carved in high relief—two humans and four schematic animals with lozenge-shaped bodies, possibly lizards, frogs, or tortoises. Two human figures in the round project forward from the front edge of the lid, their knees bent and their hands raised to cover their faces; a third figure has been lost. Not knowing the context for which this box was intended, we can only speculate in interpreting this decorative program. Nonetheless, it demonstrates the impulse toward order, organization, and classification that runs through Dogon art and thought.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 48.

Published: Beaudoin, 1984: 76.

51. CONTAINER WITH HORSE'S HEAD
Wood
L. 22⅜ in. (56.8 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.41

Although smaller than most other examples, this rectangular, flat-bottomed container with a projecting horse's

head and tail resembles large, troughlike vessels called *aduno koro*, "ark of the world," or *vageũ bana*, "dish of the ancestors" (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 465). These containers, some of which are over six feet long, are kept in each lineage head's house, *ginna*, and are used to hold the raw and cooked meat of sheep and goats that are sacrificed to the family's altars dedicated to Amma, the Creator, and the family's own ancestors, *vageũ*, at the annual ritual known as *goru*. Performed in each *ginna* at the time of the winter solstice, *goru*, which also means humidity, richness, and abundance, is the culmination of the rituals that celebrate the millet harvest, which will sustain the family for the coming year (Calame-Griaule, 1968: 110; Dieterlen, 1982: 96).

Containers with horses' heads, as well as many other wooden vessels and slit drums, have been interpreted as representations of the mythic ark that descended from heaven to reorganize and populate the world (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: 446–50, 473–74). The ark sent by Amma, the Creator, was guided by Nommo, the primordial being who monitors purity and order in the universe. In addition to the eight original ancestors of mankind, the ark also contained everything that would be essential to life on earth. When the ark landed on the earth, Nommo was transformed initially into a horse that pulled the ark along a zigzag course to water, and later into the fishlike form by which he is known and worshipped as the "Master of Water."

The container's boxlike shape and the horse's head and tail may suggest the ark pulled by Nommo in horse form. The geometric decoration on both sides of this vessel is unusual, since most such containers portray human figures interpreted as the ancestors who traveled to earth in the ark. In this example, the sides are filled with deeply cut rows of chevrons bordered by a zigzag line carved in high relief. Zigzags and chevrons are common in Dogon art. They have been likened to the vibrating, oscillating, or spiraling path of the agents of creation, such as Nommo; by extension they are likened also to Nommo's earthly manifestations in falling rain, flowing streams, and rippling ponds (Griaule, 1947a: 447). In this vessel, the sea of chevrons may represent the body of water to which the Nommo/horse dragged the heavenly ark; it may also refer to the life-giving rain that nourished the millet whose harvest is the occasion for using the vessel and to the "humidity," a synonym for vitality and fecundity, which is invoked in the very name of the *goru* rite at which it is used.

Published: New York, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1972: no. 38.

52. NECKREST
Wood
L. 15⅜ in. (39 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.66

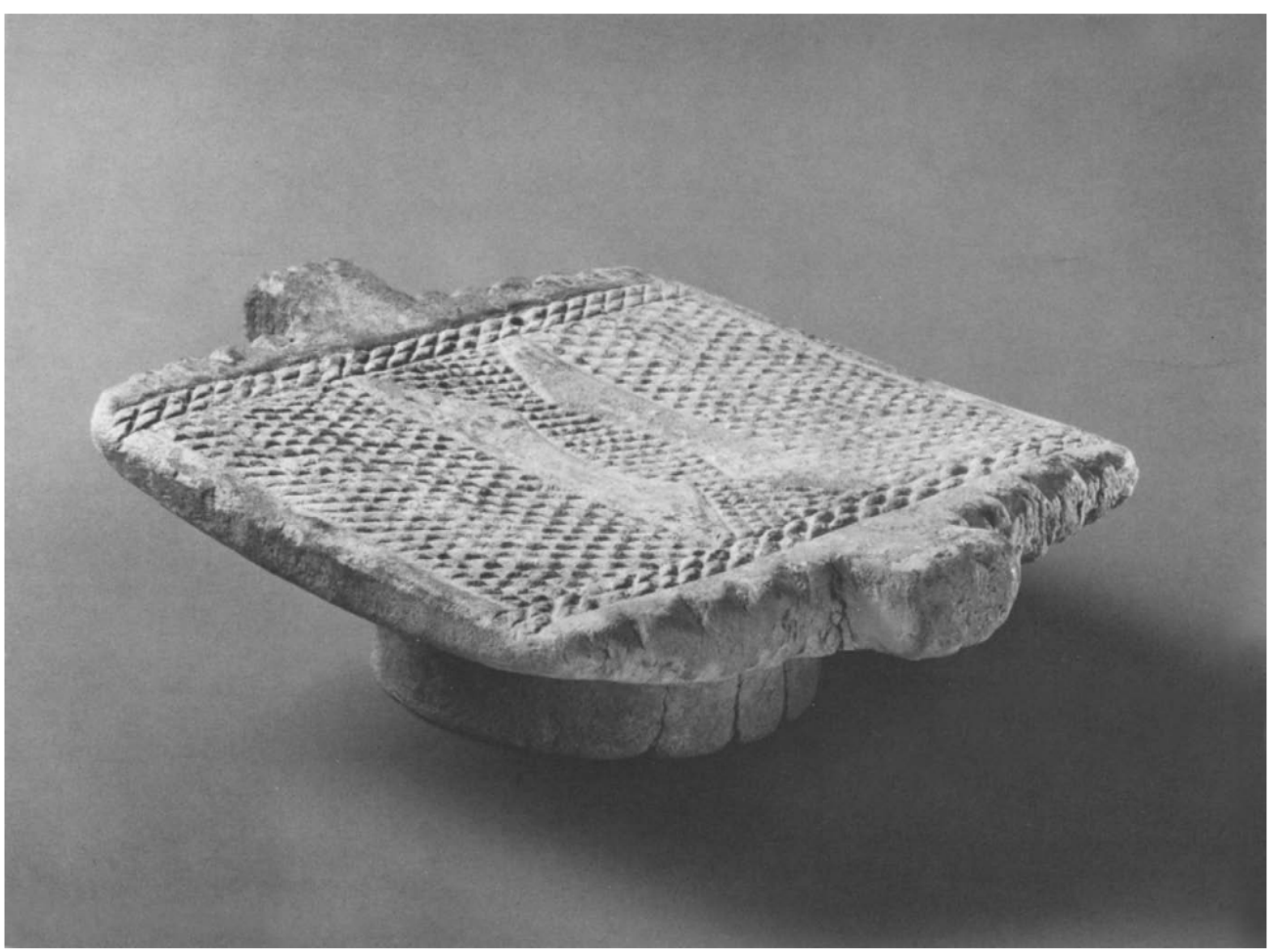
Neckrests such as this, found in caves in the Bandiagara cliffs high above Dogon villages, are among the oldest surviving wooden objects in West Africa. In the 1960s, when archaeologist Rogier M. A. Bedaux excavated the caves, he discovered remains of the Tellem, people who preceded the Dogon on the cliffs (Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977). Although the Tellem did not live in the caves except as a place of refuge, they built mud-brick granaries in some for food storage and used others for funerary rituals and communal burials. The burial caves contained many objects that were presumably offered as gifts for the dead. The group of objects found in the burial caves seems to refer to the daily activities of the deceased, such as the hoe handles of a farmer or the bows and arrows of a hunter. Only a few of the burial caves contained neckrests, which may have been a sign of high status. Materials found with the neckrests have been dated by the carbon-14 method to the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Neckrests of the type seen here, which have a curved rest, vertical support posts, and a base, were found primarily in male burials. The projection from the central post in this example is an unusual feature, found on only one of the forty-seven neckrests excavated by Bedaux (1974: fig. 10). It is bent in two places, which suggests several interpretations—an outstretched arm with bracelets incised at the wrist; the slithering, zigzag motion of a snake; and a horse's head and elongated neck, with an incised X on the head for the bridle and a sharply angled Adam's apple projecting from the neck, as in the container with horse's head in no. 51. All these interpretations have many parallels in Dogon art, but none of them can be applied here with any certainty. This neckrest was carved from a block of light wood held horizontally; its surface, badly eroded in parts, is mottled with dark-brown and cream-colored flecks, which suggests that substances were applied intentionally, perhaps as part of the burial ritual.

53. NECKREST OR HEADBOARD
Wood
L. 6¼ in. (15.8 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.64

Tellem burial caves with predominantly female skeletons contained a type of object identified by Bedaux as a neckrest (Bedaux, 1974: 21). A typical example has a square or rectangular surface supported by a very low, circular base with a concave bottom; small, rectangular projections often extend from two opposite edges of the rest. The upper surfaces of these objects are more extensively decorated than other types of Tellem neckrests. The pattern seen on this object is almost identical to that found on several excavated by Bedaux (1974: figs. 22, 24, 31, 34, 54). A rectangular field is divided into three sections, and the outer two are filled with incised cross-hatching. In the center section the undecorated surface is played against cross-hatched geometric shapes—an oval flanked by two triangles. The extensive cross-hatching and the use of balanced, orderly compositions based on opposed triangles are characteristic of the decoration found on many Dogon sculptures, household objects, and personal ornaments.

Because these objects are extraordinarily low—this one is only 1⅝ inches high—Roy Sieber has suggested that they may not be neckrests at all but rather headboards like those documented among the Jarawa of northern Nigeria (Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1980: 78; Sieber, 1987). They provide stability and balance for heavy loads carried on the head, the way Dogon women carry water, crops, and firewood. Since none of the objects excavated by Bedaux were found supporting the skulls of the Tellem buried in the caves, they may well have served a function other than that of a neckrest. If indeed these objects are headboards, they can be seen as grave offerings emblematic of female occupations, just as the hoe handles, bows, and arrows found in the caves are references to the work of Tellem men.



54. FOOTED BOWL
Pottery
H. 5¼ in. (13.3 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.59a

Pottery bowls on bases with three or four feet were found in Tellem caves directly below those used for communal burials and are believed to have been used in funeral ceremonies rather than for domestic purposes (Bedaux, 1980; Bedaux and Lange, 1983). This example, although not from a documented site, has brown and white speckles on its base that may be the remains of sacrificial materials. The present-day Dogon people do not make bowls of this type, although pottery vessels still play an important role in their funerary rituals.

The footed Tellem bowls were made by placing clay over a mold to form the vessel's rounded bottom and then adding coils of clay to build up the sides to a rim; the curved legs and base were then attached to the underside. Decoration in the form of fiber-cord impressions, fine grooves, and occasional ridges was applied to the outside of the bowls.

The Tellem bowls excavated by Rogier Bedaux have been dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, on the basis of carbon-14 dates obtained from human bones buried in the caves associated with them (Bedaux and Lange, 1983: 16). These dates are problematic, since these caves in particular are easily accessible to the Dogon and have been disturbed many times since their contents were deposited. This bowl has been dated by the thermoluminescence technique and is thought to have been made around 1300.[1] Bowls of similar form have been found in many parts of Mali and Burkina Faso, particularly in areas closely associated with the Mali Empire, such as Niani and Kangaba, and in sites under Mali's jurisdiction or settled by its emigrants, as at Dogo in southern Mali and at places in the Inland Niger Delta (Bedaux, 1980; Bedaux and Lange, 1983). Footed bowls like this are important evidence of the cultural contacts over vast distances that have occurred in West Africa through trade and migration since the earliest times. Despite their isolated location and difficult environment, the peoples of the Bandiagara cliffs—both Tellem and Dogon—have actively participated in the broader cultural developments of the Niger valley.

1. Daybreak Nuclear and Medical Systems, Guilford, CT; reference no. 128A26. The material of the sample was first fired between 440 and 860 years ago, with 660 most probable.

55. NECKLACE
Iron, copper alloy
Diam. of disk: 4⅞ in. (12.4 cm.)
The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art

Necklaces with one or more pendants are often carved in relief on Dogon figurative sculptures (see nos. 1 and 6), and some figures even wear real necklaces made of iron. These are depictions of *dugo*, pendants made of polished stones, glass beads, or iron rings, which have been described as "signs of alliance" between the wearer and a spiritual power (Dieterlen, 1938). All Dogon men and women wear necklaces with *dugo* pendants that connect them to the immediate ancestor whose spirit they have inherited. Some individuals also wear *dugo* to indicate their roles as priests or to define other special relationships they may have with real or mythic ancestors. *Hogon*s, for example, the supreme religious authorities of the Dogon, are priests of Lebe and wear *dugo* necklaces that ally them with this mythic ancestor. Similarly, priests of *binu*, the totemic ancestors, wear the *dugo* given to their clan as tokens of the *binu*'s continuing concern for their descendants. Some women acquire *dugo* from the *binu* and are empowered to intercede with them on behalf of the women in their village. Other women, graced with powers of clairvoyance, wear *dugo* said to have been given them by Amma, the Creator. In all these instances, the *dugo* contain the *nyama*, or vital force, of the ancestor. They are signs of the mutually beneficial relationship between the ancestor and the descendant—the ancestor protects the descendant and aids in questions

of health, fertility, and prosperity, while the descendant nourishes the ancestor's memory and spiritual force through sacrifice.

In this *dugo* necklace, a large, perforated iron disk with a hammered bulge in the center hangs from an iron ring attached to an iron-link chain. Also dangling from the chain are two groups of linked copper-alloy rings and one group of rings made of twisted iron, from which hang four iron pendants with spiral ends. A bronze pendant of similar spiral form and a group of interconnected iron rings were found in the Tellem caves (Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977: 48, 50). Dogon *dugo* necklaces vary widely, from a single bead worn on a cord to massive accumulations of stone, iron, and other materials (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1986: pl. II). While simple in form and seemingly haphazard in composition, these necklaces are rich in meaning, since every element is a link connecting the wearer to the spiritual powers that determine his or her identity as an individual and as a member of a family, village, and clan.

56. RING
Iron, copper alloy
Diam. 1 in. (2.5 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.79

A strand of twisted iron has been wound into a spiral to form this ring. The small iron circlet attached to the central turn of the spiral secures two short lengths of chain (one iron, one of copper alloy) and two small iron tongues split down the center. Similar iron tongues can sometimes be seen dangling from figure sculptures in wood or iron, and they are often attached to the simple iron hooks (*gobo*) that are placed in *binu* sanctuaries and *andugo*, or rain-making shrines (Dieterlen, 1938: 122; Dieterlen and Ganay, 1942: 30–31; Ganay, 1942: 13). Like miniature lightning rods, *gobo* hooks are said to attract and secure the *nyama*, or vital force, that activates the altars, and the tongues may have a role in this process.

A sketch of an identical ring was published by Louis Desplagnes along with other rings and ornaments worn by the *hogon* (1907: 321*bis*; see also Arnaud, 1921: 307). Iron rings are also placed, along with twisted iron bracelets, on a type of Dogon family altar called *ginna ommolo*, where they receive regular sacrificial coatings of blood, millet porridge, and burned herbs mixed with shea butter (Paulme, 1940: 110–11). Women with health problems seek the assistance of the ancestors to whom these altars are dedicated, and they wear the rings and bracelets during the healing process and afterward. Not merely ornamental, a Dogon ring such as this can be viewed as a means of collecting and transmitting spiritual forces and of signifying the wearer's ongoing relationship with the source of that power.

57. Two Bracelets
Iron
W. 2¼, 2½ in. (5.7, 6.4 cm.)
Right: The Lester Wunderman Collection of Dogon Art
Left: The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1985
1985.422.11

These wide iron cuffs have three tabs at each end, enclosing circlets from which dangle small tongues. The bracelets are decorated with chiseled patterns, now only faintly visible. Both have borders of short vertical lines that frame the design, which consists of rows of alternating hatched and plain triangles in the bracelet on the right and a cross-hatched band flanked by rows of stippled diamonds in the one on the left. Worn only by women who have borne a child, this type of bracelet is called *konulu*, "scraper"; when they become worn out women use them to scrape the bottoms of pots. The *konulu* are worn on the ankle as well as the wrist. Although in the past they were made of iron, as in these two examples, today they are made of aluminum (Dieterlen and Calame-Griaule, 1960: 53, n.47; Calame-Griaule, 1968: 167).

Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen interpret Dogon bracelets and other ornaments, like so many elements of daily life, as expressions of Dogon myths about the creation and organization of the universe and the forces that animate it. They offer several versions of the correspondence between ornament and cosmogony, in which the ornaments relate the wearer to the life-giving word of Amma, the Creator, to Nommo, and to the species of fish (*Clarias senegalensis*) that is considered a symbol of procreation (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1950: 218, n. 2; Griaule, 1955: 302; Griaule, 1965: 80–81; Dieterlen, 1981: 16–17).

While such cosmic references may seem hard to reconcile with the wearing of a simple band of iron on the wrist, several descriptions by researchers of the ways in which ornaments are manipulated during funerary rituals bear out their association with such related concepts as fertility and vitality. At death, the absence of ornaments is frequently a metaphor for the absence of life itself. A typical funeral chant for a Dogon woman includes the lines "Chosen woman, chosen woman, She has removed her broad bracelets," while for the funeral of a *yasigine*, the sole woman admitted into the men's mask society, one sings, "From the best, from the best, the big bracelet has been taken, From the best woman, from the best, the big bracelet has been taken" (Dieterlen, 1941: 120; Griaule, 1938: 337). These lines suggest that the bracelets that added sparkle to a woman's appearance are seen as a concretization of the life force that has been removed from her.

The dead woman's daughter taps a bracelet with an iron tool in order to promote the union of her mother's various spiritual components (Calame-Griaule, 1968: 179). The female relatives who mourn the woman's death also remove their own ornaments and create an assemblage of jewelry and cloth that is displayed publicly for several days to honor the dead woman (Paulme, 1940: 500, 528; Dieterlen, 1941: 113). The woman's personal ornaments are placed on the family's ancestral altar, where the life force they contain is refreshed through regular sacrifices; they are removed from the altar and worn by those who seek the ancestors' help in healing (Paulme, 1940: 110–11; Dieterlen, 1941: 172). When seen in the context of these ritual activities, which show ornaments as embodying and enhancing the wearer's life force, the interpretations that relate these objects to the spiritual forces that created and animated the universe become all the more appropriate.

58. BRACELET
Iron
W. 2⅝ in. (6.7 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1985
1985.422.10

This iron bracelet consists of a thin iron band whose tapering ends are wound into tight spirals. Rows of dots, punched from the back, border the edges and form a double zigzag. In both pattern and technique, this decoration closely resembles that found on some iron neckrests excavated in granaries in Tellem caves (Bedaux, 1974: 16, fig. 49).

Iron ornaments play a role in the burial rituals of both the Tellem and the Dogon. Bedaux found iron bracelets in Tellem caves located directly below caves used for burials; these caves also contained footed pottery bowls that suggest the caves were used for funerary rituals (Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977: 75). Desplagnes, in the earliest known description of a Dogon burial, says that the Dogon used to place ornaments alongside the dead they buried in the caves, but he asserts that this practice ceased because of the frequent violations of the caves by Fulani raiders (Desplagnes, 1907: 249; Paulme, 1940: 513). It is difficult to say with any certainty whether this bracelet or those excavated by Bedaux are of Tellem or Dogon manufacture.

59. BRACELET
Iron, copper alloy
Diam. 3⅝ in. (9.2 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.1

This bracelet consists of an open, twisted iron band whose ends are inserted into a flattened copper-alloy tube on which a small figure is seated. Similar bracelets, made entirely of copper-alloy, are also known (London, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1978: no. 27). Dogon iron bracelets and anklets are worn by the *hogon* and other priests (Desplagnes, 1907: 322, 333; Arnaud, 1921: 307). Those made of twisted iron, like this one, are also placed on personal altars, and on altars dedicated to a family's deceased members (*vageū*) and totemic ancestors (*binu*) (Dieterlen, 1938: 126; Paulme, 1940: 110–11; Dieterlen, 1941: 83, 172; Ganay, 1942: 13). Bracelets, like figure sculptures, L-shaped wooden *domolo* staffs, and iron *gobo* hooks, are ritual objects that localize the spiritual power of the ancestor to whom the altar is dedicated. The bracelets seem to play a special role in healing and are removed from the altar and worn by women who have invoked the ancestor's help in questions of health.

The copper-alloy figure seated on this bracelet resembles Dogon pendants in its smooth, undecorated surface and sinuous limbs. The figure's gesture of hands raised to the face may reflect the bracelet's possible origin on a *binu* altar, since it accords with a detailed account of the installation ceremony of a *binu* priest witnessed in 1937 (see no. 22). There has been much speculation about the meaning of Dogon figures whose hands cover their faces. That a figure performing this gesture is combined with a twisted iron bracelet of the type often associated with *binu* shrines suggests one more possible interpretation—that it depicts the *binu* priest during the climactic moment of his installation ritual.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 1.

60. PENDANT: SEATED FIGURE
Copper alloy
H. 1⅞ in. (4.7 cm.)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1985
1985.422.5

Early in this century, Louis Desplagnes wrote of the "astonishing perfection" of Dogon blacksmiths, calling the specialists who made copper ornaments like this figure pendant by the lost-wax process "especially expert and delicate workers" (1907: 367, 369). Unfortunately, he and subsequent authors provided little information about the origin of copper and its smiths among the Dogon. There is no geological or archaeological evidence for copper mining in the Dogon area, although copper has been traded and worked into ornaments there for centuries, as evidenced by a copper-alloy pendant found in one of the Tellem caves, tentatively dated to the eleventh or the twelfth century (Berg en Dal, Afrika Museum, 1977: 50, 77; Herbert, 1984: 19). The Dogon may have originally obtained the metal through the trans-Saharan trade networks that brought copper from Spain, North Africa, and the Sahara to commercial centers of the Sahel and the Sudan. Copper artifacts have been found in one such center, ancient Jenne, in contexts dating from A.D. 900 to 1400 (McIntosh and McIntosh, 1980, I: 165, 191). This figure pendant, like some other Dogon copper-alloy objects, bears a resemblance to works from the Jenne region, especially in the broad triangular nose, blocklike parallel lips, and topknot. Jenne is located only 100 miles from the Bandiagara cliffs, and the Dogon may have participated in its network of traders and craftsmen.

Dogon copper-alloy ornaments may have been made by the blacksmiths known in the Dogon language as *jemo*. These smiths are itinerant artisans and do not work exclusively for the Dogon, but draw clients from among the Fulani and Mossi as well (Paulme, 1940: 182–84; Dieterlen and Ganay, 1942: 7; Calame-Griaule, 1968: 130; Dieterlen, 1982: 76). This method of working may help explain the similarities between Dogon copper-alloy objects and those from the Jenne region and the surrounding area, where brass casters today, themselves of mixed ethnic origin, also work for a heterogeneous clientele (LaViolette, 1986: 10–11).

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 81.

61. PENDANT: SEATED FIGURE
Copper alloy
H. 1¾ in. (4.4 cm.)
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977
1977.394.30

Like other Dogon cast copper-alloy ornaments, this pendant in the form of a seated figure has a smooth, sleek surface and sinuous limbs. Pendants, plaques, and collars depicting seated, kneeling, or squatting figures are the most common, but there are also several examples in the form of standing figures and horsemen (Newton, 1981: 50; New York, African-American Institute, 1983: 82–84; South Hadley, MA, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1984: fig. 20).

Descriptions of the regalia worn by the *hogon* sometimes include copper-alloy rings, bracelets, and anklets, and Dogon women are also said to wear them (Desplagnes, 1907: 321*bis*, 373; Griaule, 1965: 81, 120). An important insight into the meaning of these ornaments is suggested by Dieterlen's mention of a calabash full of women's copper pendants and bracelets, as well as other ornaments, found in a sanctuary dedicated to the souls of the *yaũpilũ*, women who died during pregnancy or childbirth (1941: 200). The souls of such women are always enshrined in separate sanctuaries located outside the village, rather than on the family's usual ancestral altar, since their death is considered very dangerous, offensive, and contagious. The ornaments seen in the *yaũpilũ* sanctuary belonged to the unfortunate women who had died in this way, and, like the iron bracelets and rings found on other ancestral altars, they may serve as portable vehicles for the deceased's life force. Those made of copper may have a more specific meaning as well, since being copper they share the essence of Nommo, the mythical being who is said to embody this luminous material (Ganay, 1941: 34). In Dogon thought Nommo represents order, purity, fertility, and life, concepts that are opposed to the disorder, sterility, and death caused by the *yaũpilũ*. Because of their association with Nommo and the qualities he stands for, the copper ornaments may help to balance the negative forces that the *yaũpilũ* shrine must control.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum, 1973: no. 75.

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